

# *My Memoirs*

:: :: *By Grand-Admiral* :: ::

:: :: *Von Tirpitz* :: ::

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*VOL. I*

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:: :: PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C. :: ::

## PREFACE

THE despair that seized upon all patriotically minded Germans when the empire which we had thought invincible collapsed has also wrecked many people's faith in our nation and in the continuity of its historical development. It seemed to me my duty therefore to write down my Memoirs, because I can show proofs that the ancient structure of our state was not antiquated and rotten, but was capable of any development, and moreover that the political legend of a ruthless autocracy and a bellicose military caste having let loose this war is an insult to truth. The Kaiser in particular did not want the war, but did his utmost to prevent it when he realised the danger.

If history is just and cannot be perverted by the fabrication of legends, it should show that by far the greater measure of the responsibility for this war rests with our enemies. The rule of the road at sea puts the blame in collisions on the person who causes the danger of the situation, and not on the one who makes a mistake through incorrect judgment at the last moment in his endeavour to escape from it. Our misfortune, however, did not proceed from the acquisition of power, but from the weakness which did not know how to use that power either for the purpose of preserving or concluding peace, and in addition, from our illusions about our enemies, the nature of their war aims, their conduct of the war, and the nature of the economic war.

In order to make myself understood, I must speak the truth to the best of my knowledge. I am compelled, therefore, to present the actions of persons who are still alive according to my own views, which will probably differ from theirs,

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and therefore perhaps cause pain. Nothing is farther from my mind than to impute to them ignoble ends, or any blame in the general sense of the word.

It is only Germany's desperate position which forces me against my own inclination to publish these facts during my lifetime.

A. V. TIRPITZ.

JAGDHAUS ZABELSBERG,

*April 1919.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Now that the writing of my Memoirs is finished, I feel that I must heartily thank all those who have supported me in my task. Besides my friends and my comrades, both young and old, who have examined the correctness of my statements in the light of their own information, these thanks are due especially to the Professor of History in the University of Frankfort, Dr. Fritz Kern, who has stood at my side from the very beginning in the most sympathetic and untiring way. Lastly, I should like to thank the publisher, Dr. Koehler, for the friendly interest that he has shown in the book.



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# MY MEMOIRS

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE PRUSSIAN NAVY

1. Entering the Service. Junker and *Stüerkes*. Prussian navy and Prussian politics, 1866-1870. Warfare then and now.—2. Foreign political currents. Relations with England. More at home in Plymouth than in Kiel. The superiority of the English. “But you are not a sea-going nation.”

### I

WHEN I was a boy there was scarcely any trace left of the enthusiasm for the navy which the Revolution of '48 aroused in Germany, although it flickered up once more in the year 1864 after the Battle of Jasmund. My going into the navy was not the result of a passionate fondness for it, but was the unintentional product of my father's educational ideal, which was ahead of his time. As my father felt in himself the lack of a knowledge of the exact sciences, he sent my brother and me to the *Realschule* of our native town Frankfort-on-the-Oder, instead of to the *Gymnasium*, intending to let us change schools when we reached the top form. But owing to the undeveloped state of the *Real* teaching at that time, the school was inefficient; I have felt the effects of this all my life. Our teachers were so old-fashioned that they spoke a language which we really did not understand. As a scholar I was very mediocre, and at Christmas 1864 my certificate was “Moderate.” My school friend Maltzahn had expressed his intention of entering the navy, and so it occurred to me that it might mean a certain relief for my parents if I too were to take up the idea. At first my proposal

was received in complete silence at home, but after some weeks my father called me to him. My depressed state of mind had been noticed. My mind seemed to be set on the navy, he said, and if I wanted to go, no obstacle would be placed in my way. Nobody could have been more surprised than I; but what was I to do? I kept to my word, and in the spring of 1865 I presented myself at the age of sixteen for the entrance examination at the Naval Cadets' Institute of those days in Berlin, passed, to everybody's surprise, fifth on the list, and became a sailor.

The attractions of the navy were, as I have said, slight at that time. In 1861 the corvette *Amazon*e had gone down with almost all the cadets on board who constituted the supply of officers for several years to come. This event reduced the applications for naval cadetships to three the following year. Even in my year the lack of competition compelled the conditional acceptance, in addition to the ten successful candidates, of almost as many who had failed. The grasp of naval affairs possessed by the Prussian *Intelligentsia* of those days, as well as the hereditary German tendency to regard everything from the standpoint of domestic party politics, is indicated by an article which appeared at the time in the *Gartenlaube*. It described in serial form how the Prussian Junker party attempted to destroy the liberal institution of the navy by bribing a Danish captain to ram the *Amazon*e. The author of this malicious piece of foolery seemed to overlook the fact that the majority of the cadets who were drowned were themselves "Junkers"; Prince Adalbert was very careful in his choice of prospective officers.

Moreover, I occasionally found in my earlier presentations of the Navy Estimates to Parliament that certain Conservative circles distrusted the idea of a fleet. It was not considered to be in keeping with the Prussian tradition, it competed in some degree with the army, it seemed too closely related with industry and commerce in view of the agricultural distress of

that time and the great economic conflicts of the parties. Individual members of the extreme Right even voted against the Second Navy Bill of 1900, against the "horrible Fleet" as a Conservative leader called it,—whilst overwhelmingly sympathetic support was to be found from the outset among the Liberal *bourgeoisie*, side by side with some of the bitterest opposition to the Bill.

The immediate result of the sinking of the *Amazon* was to increase still further the confusion in our Naval Officers' Corps in 1864. Portions of this corps had been previously transferred from the army, whence cavalrymen in particular brought with them the youthful independence necessary for naval service; others came from the German or Danish navies: others again had been trained in England, America, or Holland. In addition the so-called Dantzig *stüerkes* were enlisted from the merchant sailing ships in order to fill the gaps which the war with Denmark had revealed in the Officers' Corps. Dantzig was still our real port. These seamen usually only sailed on the short voyage between Dantzig and England, whilst the better type went up into the North Sea. The influx of these uneducated sea-dogs from the merchant service of those days brought many a joke into our mess; we called them *Hilfsbarone*, and they included some remarkable characters who were removed after 1870, several of them after proceedings had been taken by a Court of Honour. Their authority was often not recognised by the crews, whereas the officer from the Cadet Institute always maintained discipline, even though he was in a certain sense on more friendly terms with the lower deck. Washington's principle of only taking gentlemen for his officers proved its wisdom in our case also. It is only bravery in face of the enemy that can make up for lack of education. In general, the naval cadets of those days were short of teachers who could be considered educators. According to the good Prussian tradition, there was no lack of drudgery: we were dragged from one course to another until we reached officers' rank after

four and a half years. But the teachers had little idea of handling this human material. Many of the old Prussian naval officers therefore went their own way or became cranks; at the best they were self-taught. My year, however, was favoured: we had an excellent staff, to whom I look back with gratitude. Admiral Batsch was our Commander at that time. It is said with some justice that it depends upon the way cadets are handled in the first year whether the "crew" turns out well or not.

Duty centred in the main in learning how to handle rigging. The art of navigation as evolved through the centuries required long training for officers and ratings. As was usual in the days of sailing ships, we had various adventures during our training cruises, which made us understand the days of Marryat and Nelson as though we had lived in them ourselves.

It was seldom that the paths of the Prussian Navy crossed those of Prussian politics. When this did happen, it was generally in the way related to us by those who took part in the voyage of the *Gazelle* to Japan in 1864. A German ship had gone ashore in the neighbourhood of Yokohama, and had been looted. The captain of the *Gazelle*, Captain von Bothmer, went thither with a landing party to protect it. On the way he met a *daimio* who demanded *kowtow*. Our captain refused. The *daimio* was surrounded by 3,000 Japanese knights in steel armour, with lowered heads, and arms crossed over their swords. Finally the captain got out of the difficulty by offering the salute which is given to a royal prince in Prussia. This was agreed to: a march past at the double with fixed bayonets. The ships were also used for reprisals against exotic states. As a rule, however, in those days we went on instructional cruises with no other end in view than that of training the fleet.

There was an atmosphere of the Middle Ages about our actions in war-time too. The *Niobe* had to reckon with meeting the Austrian steam corvette *Erzherzog Friedrich* in the



Channel in 1866, and, being a sailing-ship, had to avoid a fight. I was then No. 3 at the muzzle-loading gun, and it was my duty to put in the cannon balls; by my side lay my pike, ready to hand in case the enemy should grapple and press through the port-hole. Other people stood ready with pole-axes which they were to strike into the hull of the enemy vessel, and use as steps. Off the Scilly Islands we sighted a ship lying-to, resembling the Austrian in build. She got under way and was evidently bearing down upon us; she then rigged her funnel and pursued us under steam. Fog separated us during the night. When it lifted near Plymouth, and we stood-by, cleared for action, the frigate hoisted the Norwegian flag, and we youngsters were disappointed in our eager anticipation of a fight. Later we lay at Kiel with loaded guns off the streets of the old town, which lead down to the water-side, when the Prussians under Manteuffel advanced across the canal at Holtenau, and it seemed questionable whether the Austrians under Gablentz would put up a resistance or not. Gablentz, however, entrained and went off, our band playing meanwhile. The Austrian officers had been very popular in Kiel; their many promises were now broken, but they had won all hearts, whilst the Prussians, who looked as though they had swallowed their ram-rods, came to disturb the desired formation of an independent little state of Sleswig-Holstein. In spite of the existing state of war we rejoiced at Tegetthoff's naval victory at Lissa almost as though he were one of ourselves. In 1864 the Austrian fleet had fought very bravely at our side in the heavy engagement near Heligoland, and Austria was still looked upon by us as a German brother-country; in those days Austria's Czechs and Poles were completely overlooked.

Our reputation abroad rose considerably in 1866. Once before we had felt humiliated at the way we had been looked down upon in Cadiz when the Spanish officer kept us waiting for the quay-side inspection. But in Marseilles in 1867 the people came rushing on board to see the Prussians.

In Nice needle-guns were exhibited in the fair-booths. To be sure the French officers gave us a foretaste of 1870 partly by their arrogance and partly by ill-concealed vexation.

In the spring of 1870 our first armoured squadron was formed of four different ships, and I was a sub-lieutenant on the flagship *König Wilhelm*. Prince Adalbert, who had begged to be allowed to command the squadron, was no longer at the height of his power, but after some hesitation the King granted his request—to celebrate his resignation, so to speak—and we sailed for the Azores. Training on these armoured ships was still influenced by the customs of the sailing-ships: we even tried to sail on this voyage, but the hulks refused to move. The position of the Prussian Navy at that time is characterised by the fact that we had no dock-yards for big ships in German harbours. When the ships were commissioned it was not sufficiently understood that an iron ship must be docked every year to be cleaned. When the war with France began to smoulder, our squadron had not been docked for several years; we calculated later that the *König Wilhelm* had over sixty tons of mussels on her bottom, which had reduced her speed from fourteen to ten knots. An engine defect compelled us to run into Plymouth for a lengthy period of repair, and the English Admiral offered us his dock. It is still not clear to me why we did not accept it; it was stated in the board-room at the time that the Prince was the difficulty, because he could not stay all the time in the dock-yard. However that may be, we steamed back through the Channel in the middle of July, without having been into dock, in daily expectation of being attacked by the French, against whom our only defence would have been practice shot (filled with peas) and a fuse which misfired at every opportunity.

On July 16th we arrived in Wilhelmshaven, where mobilisation was in full swing, but we could not enter the harbour because the sluice gates were not yet completed; so we remained in the Roads. The dangers of being without a

dockyard crippled the squadron ; any damage to the ship's bottom was irreparable and put her out of action. We now went through a hard time in the outer roads. We were to go into action if Hamburg or any other place on the North Sea were attacked. We put to sea twice ; once as far as the Dogger Bank to watch the two new French armoured vessels which had been sent to reinforce the French Eastern Squadron, and the second time when we expected to find the French fleet scattered after a gale, to leeward of Heligoland. On neither occasion did we see any fighting. The army reproached us for not attacking the whole French fleet when it suddenly appeared off Wilhelmshaven on its way home. We youngsters were also indignant at not being let loose on the enemy, but this caution was correct. We were three armoured ships to their eight, and we could only steam 10 knots ; even though Captain Werner had advertised the *König Wilhelm* in "*Gartenlaube*" as the strongest ship in the world, this was not sufficient to counterbalance a threefold superiority. In view of the lack of any possibility of refitting we had to risk the loss of our whole fleet, without gaining any advantage. It was also difficult for the lay mind to understand why we did not at least attempt a raid. An engagement begun at sea, however, cannot be broken off if the enemy has the advantage of speed. In any case the navy was blamed for its inactivity, and we were not even allowed to count these years as war service.

In 1870 we had some excellent Lloyd steamers which we could have armed for privateer warfare. We kept, however, to the declaration made at the beginning of the war, that we would not privateer. When the French seized our merchantmen, we ultimately changed our standpoint, but it was then too late for the necessary preparations.

The maritime law of those days, based on the Paris Convention of 1856, prevented the French from bombarding open towns ; though if they had done so we could have taken reprisals. Any disarming of our warships lying in foreign

waters was also against maritime sea law, which at that time was respected. Our ships coaled in Vigo whilst the French ships lay outside, and a French sloop was actually within the harbour watching us. In the open roads of Fayal in the Azores the French armoured vessel *Montcalm* circled round our sloop *Arcona* which was lying at anchor there, without doing it any harm. In short, it was a naval war without the English. In the later world-war the lawyers of the Foreign Office and the Reichstag still placed the greatest faith in the niceties of maritime law, whilst the English passed them over with sovereign power, and will strive after the war for a new maritime law which will stabilise their police control of the seas.

The campaign which had been so glorious for the army lay heavily on the navy. In addition, our inactive war service in the outer roads had been a heavy strain. We were prepared for an attack at any time under unfavourable conditions. Our mine barrier troubled us more than it did the enemy; the defective mines broke loose in a heavy sea and drifted about in the roads. For months I took a four hours' watch every night on the projecting ram of the *König Wilhelm*, keeping a look-out for our own mines, although this would have been just as useless for catching loose mines in the misty autumn weather as the floating wooden barricade attached to the bowsprit of the ship.

The greatest war feat of our squadron, however, was its entry into the locks of Wilhelmshaven when the winter compelled us to leave the outer roads. The harbour was unfinished; sheep were still grazing on the bottom of the docks on July 16th. The fairway into the harbour had not yet been dredged sufficiently; therefore in order to enter we had to unload munitions and coal to lighten the ship. During a lull in the weather on December 22nd, a heavy ice-drift set in; the floes rose as high as the batteries and cut the anchor chains. It was impossible for coal-barges to come into the roads. The entry had to be risked, for apart

from the fact that the exit from the roads at Wangeroog was dangerous, we had no fuel left on board to take us to Norway.

The entry was effected with great difficulty : on December 23rd at midday everything that we possessed lay in the harbour basin, and with that, as far as we were concerned, the war ended.

But it was not the Prussian way to allow us to enjoy our irresponsible existence in idleness. Partly in order to maintain discipline, and partly because it was thought that the navy ought to be tackled in a more military manner and brought up to a more soldierly standard, a tremendous amount of infantry drill was carried out in the winter months. The Stosch era was casting its shadow before.

## II

My feelings towards England were determined by my family and my profession. The *milieu* in which I grew up was steeped in memories of the Wars of Liberation ; my great-uncle had been orderly officer to York von Wartenburg ; and even in my childhood's days patriotic sentiment pointed a finger at anybody whose behaviour in '13 had not been above suspicion. There was still a strong preference for our old ally, England. That had not been permanently dimmed even by Palmerston's much-resented rejection of Germany's naval aspirations, nor by the reconnoitring services which the British performed round Heligoland for the Danes, against Tegethoff in 1864. At all events my father, who inclined to liberal views in home politics, shared the resentment which was growing up in the Gneisenau circle against selfish Great Britain, and cherished his own youthful memories of the other allies of Prussia's regeneration, the Russians. The difference of opinion among the grown-ups at home naturally reacted upon us children, and I can remember acting in a little play at a party at home in which my sister



played the Englishman, my brother (who inherited the disposition of our two refugee grandmothers) played the Frenchman, and I as the Russian received the blows which represented the Crimean War.

As a cadet I soon found from my own experience that the Prussians were still esteemed in England. Between 1864 and 1870 our real supply base was Plymouth, where Nelson's three-deckers and the great wooden ships of the line of the Crimean War lay in long lines up the river. Here we felt ourselves almost more at home than in the peaceful and idyllic Kiel, which only grumbled at Prussia and whose harbour was crossed at that time by one little steamer only, bringing flour from the water-mill at Swentin.

In the Navy Hotel at Plymouth we were treated like British midshipmen, even in regard to prices. As we poor brothers in arms of Waterloo had not yet offended England by our economic power we were suffered with friendly condescension. Our tiny naval officers' corps looked up to the British navy with admiration, and our seamen sailed in those days quite as much in English ships as German. The majority of our ratings served for twelve years on the English model and only a small section were recruits, but these latter had sailed in every merchant service, part of them even in the American navy, and all spoke English. We officers were on the best of terms with the English, and kept up this comradeship right into the last few years before the world-war, when the younger British officers began to pay less attention to manners (the result of the lowering of the social standard among the new-comers), and to alter their behaviour towards us in consequence of prolonged agitation against us.

The seeds of Britain's displeasure were sown on September 2nd, 1870. When our squadron anchored off Dover in July, 1870, in view of the threat of war, we were welcomed by innumerable steamers, closely packed with people, who shouted in a friendly way: "It is all settled between France and

Prussia," because they believed that peace was assured after the Hohenzollern's candidature for the throne had been withdrawn.

The general attitude then was still: Poor Prussia! if only it is not swallowed up by Napoleon! We were looked upon as the attacked party. It was after the battle of Sedan that English feeling changed round, though this did not affect the navy, which still continued to treat us as professional brothers. It struck me, however, that the upper classes of English society abandoned our side immediately the war was over, a change which was helped by the much closer tie between their civilisation and Paris, and by their coolness towards what was felt to be German lack of form.

The Prussian navy had little tradition of its own. The expedition to Eastern Asia still stood out as a kind of famous enterprise, and then there was the war against Denmark (in which, however, the lack of a proper fleet was keenly felt when the support desired by Prince Friedrich Karl for the transportation of troops to Alsen broke down owing to the bad weather, the weak engines of our gunboats, and the superiority of the Danish fleet). We grew up on the British navy like a creeping plant. We preferred to get our supplies from England. If an engine ran smoothly and without a hitch, if a rope or a chain did not break, then it was certain not to be a home-made article, but a product of English workshops—a rope with the famous red strand of the British navy. In those ships which we had built ourselves things broke with uncomfortable readiness. When I came to Berlin in the winter of 1869 for the Artillery Test Commission, the great national question of Krupp *v.* Armstrong, which had just been decided in Krupp's favour, was still throbbing in people's minds. The navy had been for Armstrong. In those days we could not imagine that German guns could be equal to English.

When an Englishwoman saw our crews on board the *Friedrich Karl* at Gibraltar in 1873, she said in astonishment, "Don't they look just like sailors?" For our men were superior

to the British at that time, just as I believe they were at the beginning of the world-war. When I asked her how else they should look, she replied in a most decided tone, "But you are not a sea-going nation."

On the whole Bismarck's words to Geelach in a letter of 1857 hold good for the relationship between us. . . . "As for foreign countries I have had all through my life a sympathy for England and her people, and it comes over me even now from time to time. But these people do not want to be loved by us."



## CHAPTER II

### THE STOSCH ERA

1. In Hamburg, 1871. German fishermen under a foreign flag. Foreign service. Carthagera.—2. "Those are soldiers." The militarisation of the navy. The Naval Academy. The Naval Staff. Stosch's plan for the foundation of a navy.—3. We explore. Manysidedness of maritime interests.

#### I

FROM 1871 to 1888 the navy worked under landmen. Lieut.-General von Stosch relieved Prince Adalbert of the chief command in 1871, and at the same time took over the Naval Department of the War Ministry. General von Caprivi succeeded him as Head of the Admiralty from 1883 up to the beginning of the William II era.

When the fine flag with the eagle was struck on our ships in 1867, and the flag of the North German Federation, more on the English pattern, was hoisted in its place, we ensigns were pained, it is true, at the disappearance of the Prussian colours, but we anticipated a great historical change, and emptied our glasses with mixed feelings. The year 1871 pushed the memory of Prussia further back; we became Imperial officers and the navy received the black-white-and-red cockade.

We of the navy were in touch with the Hanseatics at a time when they were anti-Prussian and refused military service. In 1871 I was a lieutenant on the *Blitz* in the Elbe, where Prussia had put a guardship in 1866 to watch the annexationist tendencies of Hamburg. This outpost was left on the frontier, forgotten; we had light river- and harbour-police duties; in general, however, we were only for

show—and enjoyed Hamburg's friendship until Stosch found out in the autumn of 1872 that we were kicking our heels there, and cancelled the command. The harbour of Hamburg, full of poetry—the maze of sailing ships lay along the quayside, for the docks had not yet been built—still had all the character of an import harbour. The shipping was chiefly in English hands, and one could perceive how much Germany's chief port had formerly been an English agency. It was not until the year 1895 that the German flag predominated for the first time over the English in Hamburg harbour. When the *Blitz* lay in the Elbe, the Hamburgers, feeling themselves to be merely a passive commercial centre, still inclined towards England, upon whom indeed they were absolutely dependent, while Germany had to take their coffee and tobacco at any cost, so that even long afterwards the Hamburgers struggled against their incorporation in the Zollverein (1888).

Stosch started from the idea of developing Germany's maritime interests, of strengthening and protecting "Germanism" and German labour throughout the world. This policy was first brought home to me when I was first officer of the gunboat *Blitz*, by an order to protect the fisheries.

Like more important things the German herring fisheries had gone to ruin during the centuries of our weakness and poverty. Stosch was the first man to support the first herring fishing association which was re-formed in Emden. The enterprise laboured under a disadvantage, because we had further to go to the herring grounds than the foreign fishermen, and the tax of one thaler upon every ton of herrings—dating from Frederick the Great's administration in Eastern Friesland—did not allow so young an industry to thrive with unskilled labour.

Before the world-war, we unfortunately imported foreign fish, mostly herrings, to the value of far more than Mk. 100,000,000. A rather higher tariff which was aimed at was wrecked by the catchword "the poor man's herring," although

the tax would have been scarcely noticeable on a single herring at the retail dealers. It was the middleman between Emden and Berlin who doubled the price of herrings.

The five Emden trawlers who first ventured out herring fishing asked for military protection, because neither their lives nor their nets were safe among the Scottish and Dutch fishermen who fished in hundreds on their customary grounds. Our old wooden gunboat was at the same time to study the best way of making catches and the best stations for the herring shoals. Owing to the breaking of a mast we arrived late at the grounds—it was June, and as light as day at midnight at more than  $60^{\circ}$  longitude; the sea was calm and covered with fishing boats, Dutchmen, Scots, and a few French—but when we looked round for our charges we could not find them for days. At last we saw a few trawlers which answered to our description, and actually recognised through the telescope the thin black-white-and-red strip which had been given us as a mark of recognition. When we altered course towards them, however, the nearest trawler set sail and made off. We sent a shot after her, whereupon she lowered sail. When we asked the men why they denied their German nationality, they said that to admit it would have been too unsafe, for they would have run the risk of the strangers sailing through their nets and tearing them in two. Our good Emdeners as a matter of fact sailed under the Dutch flag, and were afraid of acknowledging the German colours. The captains of our herring fleet all came from near the Dutch frontier. In Lerwick we did meet one who hoisted the German flag at our approach, dutifully brought us a ton of herrings, but then immediately put to sea and vanished. The officer of a Dutch warship lying there then told us that this trawler which had acted like a German that day had come in only the night before disguised as a Dutchman, and had gone to the Dutch vessel for a doctor and medicine. The Herring Association had itself recommended this peculiar proceeding to its members.

Thus we saw in the most illuminating way how intimidated

a great nation can become without sea-power, and how cut off we were from the riches which the sea offered us. It was not very long since Palmerston had threatened to treat any ship flying the German flag as a pirate. When we were at Amrum in the same year (1872), several trawlers from Finkenwerder hid themselves behind the island because the English North Sea fishing fleet with eighty or ninety boats covered the sea off Amrum. We advised the people of Finkenwerder to put out because we should have liked nothing better than to be able to seize one of these foreign fishermen for any transgression of the three-mile limit. The men replied, however, that they would not dare to do this because we were not always there to protect them. This was the state of our national pride and prestige along our own coasts. How we had fallen since the days of the Hanseatic League!

Stosch's increasing endeavour to further Germany's maritime interests in all directions was pursued under great difficulties from the beginning of his period of office. Foreign service at this time almost overtaxed the resources of the navy. Every commander, however, could reckon upon Stosch's consistent support in his activities abroad, even in the often independent and difficult decisions which foreign service with inadequate cable communication required. But this was not done without some friction with the Imperial Chancellor. In 1873, when I was officer of the watch on the *Friedrich Karl*, we received orders to protect Germans in the ports of Southern Spain where civil war was raging. While doing so we seized a sloop that had been captured by the insurgents and was flying a red flag; but this did not meet with Bismarck's approval. Then again our commander, Werner, in conjunction with the British armoured vessel *Swiftsure*, was asked by the Germans and also the Spanish municipal authorities of Malaga to seize the insurgent ships *Almansa* and *Victoria*; he did so, and put their *personnel*, together with their leader, General Contreras, on shore at Carthagená. But an order came from Berlin for the dismissal

of Werner, and for the recall of our squadron from the roads of Carthagen. We heard afterwards that in Berlin, both Stosch and Moltke had supported Werner whilst Bismarck insisted upon his dismissal and actually wanted to bring him before a court martial.

In Carthagen we had been co-operating with British ships, which to our shame we had now to leave in the lurch. At Gibraltar, Werner was relieved of his command. When he left the ship he read us some letters from Stosch, and ended with the words, "That's what the fellow writes to me." He rebelled, so to speak. Hitherto we had been held in high esteem; it had been enough for our flag to show itself; when the word was passed "Frederico Carlos està aqui," the whole coast, filled as it was with insurgents, at once became quiet. But our prestige declined so much after the sacrifice of Werner, that we afterwards experienced great difficulties, and not only with the insurgents. Whilst many Germans had previously remembered their nationality, and whilst their number on the consular lists was constantly increasing (in Malaga it had actually been trebled in a week), the Germans were henceforward badly treated everywhere, and ultimately in Carthagen their houses were even looted. Hereupon we received orders to proceed against the fortress of Carthagen. Now this was tactically difficult with the *Friedrich Karl* and one gunboat. Our new commander telegraphed to Stosch that it was doubtful whether he could carry out the order with the force at his disposal. Stosch's reply was phrased with the classic pungency which was characteristic of him. He said that other ships would be commissioned for our support, but that for the rest he would suggest that it was not ships but men that did the fighting. We proceeded therefore, and the order was promptly executed. But our prestige along the coast was lowered; this was not without its consequences, nor without its economic disadvantages also.

The English were not in the habit of abandoning an officer either politically or from a military point of view, whether

his action exceeded the prescribed limits or not. Whether it is the annihilation of the Turkish fleet at Navarino or the struggle for the Taku forts, the flight of the Sultan of Zanzibar's daughter, a planned murder like that of Sir Roger Casement, the "King Stephen" incident, or even the "Baralong" affair, which they have probably condemned in private, the English protect their people on principle, in order to strengthen the world's respect for Britons, and to encourage the initiative. In the English foreign service attention is paid to liberty of action, and risky enterprises are wisely carried out as far as possible by subordinates and not by chiefs of missions. With us the hierarchical order is inviolably preserved.

In this case Bismarck's motives were not known to us younger sailors, and the exposure of Werner was incomprehensible in so far as in our view it could only be welcomed by the legitimate Spanish Government, if the protection of the quite considerable German interests on the south coast at that time weakened the insurgents. Our reverence for Bismarck did not suffer from the incident any more than from his other disagreements with Stosch. His peculiar greatness carried with it perhaps the disadvantage that our knowledge of politics, like that of the majority of Germans, was not very highly developed, since everything connected with politics seemed to be provided for, so to speak, for all time by the figure of the old master who had given us the Empire.

## II

In addition we had no time for politics. Apart from the development of Germany's maritime interests, Stosch's second fundamental idea by which he left his mark on the navy was that he taught it to *work*. I do not mean work without mistakes; that was impossible with a nation that was estranged from the sea and its life; but work in its real sense. The more mature the navy became, and the more our nation came



to understand the great prospects in the sea, the more fruit did this capacity for work bear. I remember the astonished remarks of English officers when we lay in our old tubs alongside the modern English vessels at Malta in 1890, and drilled and drudged the whole day long. If they demanded so much of their people, they said, there would be mutiny. They could not understand this stringent routine, particularly as, in consequence of the short period of service of the German crews, it did not lead to complete efficiency. The year before, we had paraded a landing division before the Queen in the park at Osborne; the British naval officers exclaimed in astonishment, "These are soldiers." The impression was not quite correct, but it was significant.

Under Prince Adalbert strict care had been taken that the customs copied from the English navy should be naval and not military. For example, when the Prince made a tour of inspection the sailor had to wear his gigantic shining hat on the back of his head and to stand with his legs apart; men stepping on to the quarter-deck had to salute the flag; on board, the seaman saluted his officer by taking off his cap, his petty officer by lifting his cap, and so on with many other points of etiquette; but there was no standing stiffly to attention, nor could the hands be held to the trouser seams in the old sailing days. The crews had strenuous and dangerous but independent duties, and the petty officers often acted on their own initiative when aloft. When the ship rolled, everybody had to look to himself. The cut-and-dried army training did not exist in the service in the days of sailing ships.

When we lay in the Wilhelmshaven docks in the winter of 1870, and the rigging was all down, we were, as I said, drilled into a state of tupor. The military tendency increased too abruptly under General Stosch. Many of the older officers grumbled: there used to be one spot left in Prussia where one could live, they said, and that was the navy; this state of things could not be borne any longer. There were others,

however, who carried the infantry training and drill further than even Stosch had probably intended, in order to increase their own reputations. The slight attraction of the navy under Stosch also forced him to accept less suitable officer candidates. This fact, and the impossibility of getting any tactical schooling for the navy of those days, are together responsible for the lack of personality among the admirals of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Stosch's personality was as sharp as jagged iron. He frequently amused us during inspection by fierce reprimands which often cut to the root of the matter. I can remember one criticism at the end of an inspection, which began with the cutting words. "Sheer slop—from the commander to the lowest ship's boy!" It is true that the commander had had the honour and the misfortune to entertain Prince Friedrich Karl on board for four weeks during the summer: a kind of visit which Stosch regarded as distracting to the service. His forceful intervention in the whole development of the navy was helped by the fact that he practically united in himself both the supreme executive and the administrative command, so that internal obstacles could be easily brushed aside by him.

In the twelve-year ratings—long-service men—the old Prussian navy possessed a *personnel* such as we have never since obtained. Stosch introduced the three years', or more correctly the two and a half years' service, more ruthlessly than was adapted to the requirements of the service.

In spite of all the zeal, the frequent retirement of experts and the short-dated periods of service rendered the achievements demanded by the Admiralty quite impossible. We were brought into a well-nigh dangerous situation by the abolition of the petty officers' categories. Thus the whole of the quartermaster's *personnel* was done away with and replaced by men from the crew, so that the duties of the quartermaster had to be performed by the officers.

Just as this abolition of necessary specialists and the in-



roduction of the two and a half years' service period (which was too short for a training in navigation) did not suit the material and personal characteristics of the navy, so, inversely, the training on shore was screwed up to an importance which it did not possess.

The summer squadrons were not put into commission until May; they were expected to attain at once the highest standard and they dispersed again in the autumn before they could do anything at all. Then in the autumn the crews came ashore, mostly to the depots, but they were not arranged in categories as was done later—but treated just like regiments. There was no time left during the short summer manœuvres for any battle, or even squadron, training, and indeed scarcely any time for the roughest training in ordinary ship routine. In the words of one admiral, the squadron training in battle tactics resembled “an attempt to mould something solid out of loose sand.”

Strict watches, in the military sense, were introduced on board the ships and devoured time and energy without having any real use. We had to wear the uniform introduced by Stosch with the hussar's sash, even on watch in the tropics, until one officer fainted on the bridge; then white drill appeared once more. Further, mobilisation on army lines was introduced. Formerly the commissioning of ships had lasted several weeks, but later on we practically gave it up, and kept the ships permanently in commission. Stosch, on the other hand, demanded that since a regiment is mobilised in three days, the same should be done with the ships. The fact that the complicated microcosm of technicalities which a ship represents, interspersed with the most varied requirements and considerations, does not form an organism if all the material is thrust on board within three days, was passed over at this period with a big sponge. Stosch was never a sailor, and in addition, his advisers, who were not always well chosen, neglected to translate his military ideas into our terms, and if necessary even to oppose him. There

were too many commands, and too few questions, and consequently the sinking of the *Grosser Kurfürst* in 1878, which was partly due to this militarisation of the navy, brought the storm of criticism to the surface. From that time onwards more attention was paid to the requirements of a cruise, and to the ship as an organism. Later, Caprivi and I raised the standard of training in the fleet; in particular, by re-introducing a greater continuity in the *personnel*—in so far as the shortened period of service permitted.

In the naval academy which Stosch founded at Kiel he inspired the right idea of teaching fewer special subjects, and promoting general education and independent study. A great deal of mathematics was taught besides philosophy, natural and nautical science (regarding which we sent many observations to the museums during our cruises), and astronomy, which in any case can be reckoned among the special sciences. Naval history was insufficiently taught in those days and little was to be gained from maritime law; political economy was only added under my administration. In the course of years the academy has assumed a more specialised character, although I have always opposed its being made a purely preparatory school for the Naval Staff, and its being allowed to produce scholars who were not capable of smartness. I also tried to confine the technical side of the teaching at the schools—including the academy—more to special courses, in which there are more facilities for keeping up with the constant change in technical details than at the academy, with its restricted time and limited supply of models. More fruitful than the technical instruction in the naval schools were the scientific shipbuilding and engineering sections. It is not that the officer has to construct, but he must be able to criticise construction. The technical side is so subdivided to-day that the constructor himself loses touch with the details. In addition the mind of the pure technician is not absolutely adapted to other tasks. There are indeed from time to time engineers with a universal grasp at the

head of great undertakings, but the organising vein is more often found in lawyers or merchants. In addition to the military questions, however, particularly those of increasingly complicated tactics, the naval officer has other matters, such as organising, legal and political, to attend to. The higher naval officer must have spent some part of his life in the great world. Higher mathematics, so valuable as mental gymnastics, are, to a certain degree, dangerous for the naval officer. The subject is too absorbing in its inexhaustibility, and its exactness can, like any other theory, lead a man to underestimate the *imponderabilia*, and to forget that the art of generalship is not a logical science, but is born of intuition, on which personality primarily depends. Therefore those categories which rise to the highest positions ought not to be trained as specialists. It is good for them to have specialised in some work and to know what it means and the sum total of mental and physical labour that it contains; but their own line should diverge from the technical.<sup>1</sup> Specialisation became more and more dangerous to the navy. So much the more do I consider Stosch's educational system, which aimed at an all-round training, to be correct.

Among Stosch's efforts to establish a similarity to the army, he instituted a Naval Staff Course, and extended the Naval Staff which he had created, actually giving it a badge of its own on the lines of the "qualification stripe" of the General Staff. In the navy, however, a man must not remain long ashore or else he forgets his seamanship. Moreover the navy's active service is much more varied than that of the army. The General Staff permeates the whole army like a

<sup>1</sup> Apropos, I mention here the principle introduced by Lord Fisher in England of standardising the officers' corps so that the officer who had been trained to engineering could serve just as well on the bridge. The British naval attaché in 1913 gave as the reason for this so-called Selborne system the desire to weaken the advancing democratic influence of the trade unions in the engine-room by giving it a military point. This system does not imply any military progress.

vitalising nerve-cord, as a second safeguard side by side with the hierarchy of the commanders, as an assistant reporter for the commanders, and depending with them upon the personal connection between the Corps Staff and the great General Staff. Such a second nerve-system is inconceivable in the navy. The holding together of great masses, questions connected with advances, and similar problems disappear here; there are only a few units, namely, the ships, to lead. Even in the epoch of wireless telegraphy, it still remains true in naval warfare that the captain must be an autocrat on board his ship; and in just the same degree the chiefs of the squadron staffs cannot have officers under them who are responsible to others. Stosch's Naval Staff course was therefore shelved again; those officers who are now appointed to the Naval Staff are preferably taken from the fleet.<sup>1</sup>

How far Stosch proceeded from the standpoint of a land-general is indicated by the scheme for the establishment of a fleet that he drew up on taking over office. His ship-building programme aimed at a small concentrated raiding or "sally" fleet as the kernel of the navy—the "sally" was a land term to begin with—whilst the remaining ships were to be distributed along the whole coast as a kind of garrison facing the sea. The nature of the Baltic harbours then made it necessary to construct these ships with flat bottoms, thus producing a cross between a sea-going ship and a coastal-defence ship without any outstanding characteristic. The idea of chaining a portion of the forces to the coast was not a good one, for when the moment came to strike they all had to be concentrated again. The army model of distribution of effectives is not adaptable to the fleet; for a ship is in itself an instrument of attack. Stosch passed over such things in his masterful manner.

<sup>1</sup> This very proper abolition of the Naval Staff course rendered it more difficult to promote gifted young leaders to responsible posts at an early age, but this difficulty could be overcome by other means in case of necessity.

## III

If the beginnings of the Imperial Navy were hampered by the dominating prestige of the Army, yet Stosch, as I said, was ahead of his time in the energy with which he pushed forward our sea power that had been neglected for centuries.

He attached great value to the posting of cruisers to foreign stations, and rightly too for his time. For the political conditions in the South American States, for example, or in China and Japan, were not yet so far developed as to allow diplomatic or consular procedure to suffice in every case; the actual power on the spot decided the day.

As far back as the seventies Stosch was convinced that we must acquire colonies, and that we could not continue to exist without some means of expansion. He considered that the prosperity of the young empire would only be ephemeral if we did not counterbalance the decided disadvantage of our position and history overseas before it was too late.

At that time we could have obtained better colonies more easily than was the case later. Apart too from colonial ambitions, the navy was permeated by a thirst for knowledge of world-economics, all the greater since the news service was only feebly developed by professional consuls. When we were on foreign service with the *Friedrich Karl* in 1872 we had orders to "explore," to report on all places both as to what they were suited for and what economic importance they might have for us. I still remember how I reconnoitred the island of Porto Grande in the Cape Verd Islands; it was almost barren, high rocks with a few scattered palms, but it was the natural coaling-station between Cape Town, Europe, and South America.

During our visit to Curaçoa, too, we got the impression that the purchase of the island was being considered, and it is possible that our next year's commission, a voyage to Hawaii, was connected with something of the kind. But in the seventies

Germany did not understand such impulses. Moreover, the humiliating fact that we had to let the bulk of our increasing population emigrate abroad, as we were not yet in a position to export goods instead of human beings, stood in peculiar contrast to our political reputation. Stosch busied himself with all imperial questions that were connected with the sea, particularly the development of our stunted mercantile marine. He met with a good deal of opposition, but succeeded in setting the standard for shipping affairs in the Federal Council; he made use of the Hydrography Office, the Naval Observatory, and of our relations with the Hanseatic Ambassadors to strengthen his position. Nautical schools, in which the navy was directly interested for its supply of recruits; pilots, tonnage questions, lighthouses, surveys, the fisheries of which I spoke above, all consular affairs—in short, all the minor work of the sea—were this indefatigable man's field of activity. He broke down in ruthless fashion the old tradition of giving preference to the machinery of foreign countries, and of England in particular. Even if this youthful period of German industry brought to light the foremost abundant cases of the so-called "children's complaints" of machinery, the succeeding period has been grateful to our old chief for his policy.

Stosch took up again the broken thread of the Hansa; he was the first to feel his way towards a future for Germany overseas. He did a great deal also to breathe a fighting spirit into the navy. Mistakes were made, but in those days we were not dealing in trifles; a grave earnestness characterised our work.



## CHAPTER III

### THE CAPRIVI ERA

1. Caprivi's fundamental idea. Preparations for the approaching war on two fronts. Coastal defence. The twelve tactical questions. The Naval Staff. Our first plan of operations. The lack of a shipbuilding programme. Caprivi, Imperial Chancellor.—2. German naval officers and “Germanism.”

#### I

IN spite of the strenuous drill, the chances of war were really very slight during the Stosch era, in view of the international situation during the seventies. In those days the young imperial eagle made its first flight across the sea in peace. Whilst we had to keep two things in mind at the beginning of the twentieth century, the enormous and yet so vulnerable importance of Germany's peaceful labour throughout the world, and the dangers of war which threatened the mother country on all sides, Stosch had not to reckon with any immediate enemies. The first real manœuvres held by Stosch, which were on the smallest scale, took place in 1882 shortly before his resignation. As a matter of fact it was scarcely possible to carry out manœuvres in a tactical sense, since we had not yet had sufficient training; it was really only an exercise in the simple multiplication table, so to speak. Much time was expended on gunnery exercises and simple firing practice, but the most important feature then was the firing of concentrated broadsides at a range of only 200 and 500 yards, a fact which speaks for itself.

In Caprivi we had a new chief at the head of the Admiralty in 1883, who, under the influence of new international conditions, adapted all his work to the idea of war, although he also

followed his own bent. Caprivi was the typical General Staff officer. This man, who was understood by very few people, lived and wove his plans in the state of mind which he often expressed to me as follows: "Next year we shall have a war on two fronts." Every year he expected it the next spring. He was far less a politician than Stosch. When he was afterwards summoned to the Emperor William II, some time after Bismarck's departure, to take over the Chancellorship according to command, he said bitterly to Field-Marshal Loë on the way to the Castle, "I am now going to bury my military fame." In the words of Prince Friedrich Karl, he was too good for the navy, and ought really to have been Chief of the General Staff.

Under his influence the navy acquired politico-military aims. Whether this was right or not may be left out of the question, but it was at least an idea. Under Stosch the navy had not known for what strategic end it was working. The bulk of it was absorbed in the formalities which may be called "evolutions"; it was practising what in company drill is known as wheeling to the right and the left. The mobilisation existed only on paper. Caprivi held an inspection in the spring of 1883, and was overcome by the enormous amount of work which was going on without any proper guidance.

As it was impossible to do anything on a very big scale so quickly, and as the weakness of the navy under Stosch had always lain in the fact that it was expected to attempt more than it could perform, Caprivi restricted himself, with a view to the next war, to the preparation of strong coastal defences against Russia and France. If this "two-front" idea is not taken into consideration, it is easy to make unjust criticisms of his imperfect realisation of the navy's tasks. He said to himself: First of all the war which is coming the day after to-morrow must be settled and then we can go on developing the navy. He proceeded to get into close personal touch with the work, and even conducted the manœuvres, which



were now held every autumn, with various general and special ideas as in the army. They were generally directed against the coast, the one party attacking it and the other defending.

At that time I had already won a certain position in the navy, as the creator of the torpedo section, and could permit myself some criticism of the imperfection of our tactics. Besides, I was related to Caprivi, which fact, however, was rather dangerous with one of his nature, so that I really never gained by the relationship. But I could speak frankly, and I said to him: what we especially lack is some grasp of tactics; we do not know how we are to fight. Caprivi did everything in his power to take up this suggestion. He put the so-called "twelve tactical questions" to a series of officers whose judgment he respected. It was always premised that the French were against us, and the questions were then asked: How will the attack be regulated? What order of battle should we adopt? How were we to act in the *mêlée* which (in Caprivi's opinion) would ensue under any circumstances?<sup>1</sup>

Caprivi instituted Naval Staff cruises, during which problems were set on the following lines: Russia and France declare war upon us; the Russian fleet is trying to join the French, and we are to prevent it. It was from such situations, which served as the guiding line of the discussion, that a gradual advance was made from mere coastal defence to the demand for a High Sea Fleet. Caprivi's activities culminated in his working out personally our first plan of operations after studying the matter thoroughly; then he brought me in for consultation. The plan consisted roughly as follows: I was to run a torpedo division into Cherbourg the moment war was declared, and then the battle fleet was to proceed to Cherbourg and bombard the place. Caprivi is also the real originator of our mobilisation scheme.

In spite of his grasp of tactics, Caprivi had no definite ship-building programme. It is true he saw that the navy could

<sup>1</sup> For my part I still consider it probable that a kind of cavalry engagement must develop if a battle were fought to a finish.

not live from hand to mouth. On the one hand, however, he had been too far removed from naval matters all his life, and on the other, the views that prevailed in the naval officers' corps itself were far too vague to allow a definite shipbuilding policy to crystallise. Caprivi was amazed at the chaos of shipbuilding schemes. I explained to him, in reply to his frequent questions, that a decision on the composition of the fleet could only proceed from clarity in tactical ideas, which had not yet been obtained. Finally Caprivi's political prejudices crippled shipbuilding. On the occasion of the introduction of the two-years' service period in the Army Bill of 1893, Caprivi, who was the Imperial Chancellor, said to me: "We must not think of the creation of a strong German navy until the international and psychological necessity of a war with Russia, whom France will join, has been settled." Our continental orientation, which had been one-sided for centuries, made us overlook far too easily before 1896—what Bethmann overlooked in July 1914—that England's European policy of the *Balance of Power* would have intervened if we had beaten the Dual Alliance.

His activity as Chancellor must likewise be interpreted pre-eminently by his idea of the "two-front" war, for politics as politics were not in his line. His friendliness towards the Poles had its root in his endeavour to establish an element there which would not be too hostile to us in the event of war. When I was spending some weeks with King Humbert of Italy in 1893, Caprivi commissioned me to say to him, "The decision will take place on the Rhine." At the dissolution of the reinsurance treaty, Caprivi, as I happen to know from him personally, was actuated by the feeling that the treaty was not quite honourable in view of the unavoidable war: in addition it was depriving us of Austria's confidence. Caprivi had once gone with Prince Friedrich Karl on an official visit to Russia after 1870. While there he felt everywhere the hatred and the jealousy of the St. Petersburg officers towards the widely famed Prussian army, which I

myself can confirm from my own experiences. We had won too many victories. Caprivi used to tell how Czar Alexander II disregarded the German officers quite noticeably, until he suddenly rushed up to them in one of the rooms and said to Caprivi, "You have no idea how I like you, but I daren't show it here." Knowing Caprivi as I do, I consider it inconceivable that he was subject to any English or court influences on the occasion of the dissolution of the reinsurance treaty. In order to bind Austria more firmly to us for the event of war, he concluded the commercial treaty of 1891 with her on terms that were unfavourable for our agriculture.

Caprivi found no time to cultivate our maritime interests as Stosch had done, neither did his own personality urge him to do so. He belonged to the class of the sons of officers and government officials whose thoughts are far removed from economics, and who are not attracted by the subject. The lonely man, with no requirements of his own, brought with him little sympathy for the development of industry and commerce. He was therefore an opponent of colonial expansion at first, although when ordered he performed the military share of the acquisition of colonies with skill and energy.

## II

When I attempted during my period of office to do justice to the money-making classes, and in the spirit of Stosch to revive once more the cultivation of maritime interests that had been broken off in 1883, I ran up against many of the irregularities which have arisen during the course of German history. Misplaced economy and petty bureaucratic narrowness have made our way into the world difficult. The navy had more ample occasion to feel and realise this than the army. Its duties on the whole gave it a certain world-perspective. Until the great war, the army took the study of the world, and particularly of England, much less to heart. In all

essentials it marched into the world-war with the old ideas of a "two-front" war, and with the natural superiority which it possessed over the navy in consequence of the prevailing land tradition in Germany; it still looked upon the fleet indeed as a kind of pioneer detachment of the army, unmindful of the fact that the real main front was the sea front, now that a grave but not hopeless fate had made us the target of a world-coalition. In short, this insistence on Caprivi's standpoint under completely altered conditions was one of the historical reasons for the war taking the course it did. But more of this later.

In contrast to the land officer, the naval officer was occupied with the study of overseas forces. Intercourse with foreigners moreover rounded off the rough Prussian edges in him, without killing his appreciation of the indispensable traditions of the State. For it must never be forgotten that Prussia has fashioned in her officers one of the few fixed German types, and moreover the type which has enabled us to appear as free men in the world again, since our complete lapse into foreign slavery after Frederick the Great.

" La vie au roi,  
L'honneur pour soi,  
Sacrifiant son bien,  
Chicané pour un rien,  
Voilà l'officier prussien."

Between 1870 and 1914 the German State was too young to fashion a German type of its own. This fact did us harm in the world

The relations of the English naval officers' corps with their German comrades were still free from jealousy in Caprivi's time. The prevailing tendency in official policy at that time to regard the British fleet as the complement of the Triple Alliance almost brought our relations to that pitch of the friendliness which such an alliance implies, but this was constantly avoided by England when practical issues were

broached. The prestige we gained in 1870 helped us over our naval inferiority in our relations with the French. We admired in the French the pride of a beaten people which never forgets its honour for a moment, and we smiled many a time at the *verve romanesque* of their desire for revenge.<sup>1</sup>

Feeling against the Germans became intensified after the nineties owing to various reasons. We older men remember with peculiar feelings those days under William I, when we were still distinguished people in the world, and were well received. But this gloom which settled around us could hardly have been relieved by the "victory on both fronts" of Caprivi's imagination, and even of the General Staff's plans in 1914. For it arose especially from the unexampled growth of our overseas trade, and from the irritation created by Germany's conquest of the world's market. The annoyance of the English at our upward movement was scarcely to be felt during the Caprivi era, but it had come to light in all its strength ten years afterwards, about the middle of the nineties, long before the beginning of our real naval construction.

The accession of the Emperor William II closed the epoch of the naval generals. Stosch and Caprivi belonged to the flower of the Prussian army in Germany's greatest epoch;

<sup>1</sup> One little scene is characteristic of this. When we fell in with a French squadron off Salonika in 1876, both of us seeking satisfaction for the murder of consuls, the French were not allowed to mix with us socially; they were not allowed to accept a glass of wine even when they were on active duty with us for several hours. Once when a French captain came on board I held a general inspection, and since he was impressed by it he could not but invite me to see the same on his ship. I went, and all the formal courtesies were gone through. When we went into the battery, however, gun-drill was taking place there, and the officer in charge gave the order: "Direction: Bâbord contre la frégate turque, tribord contre la frégate Kronprinz!" Whereupon the gun crews turned round and grinned at me with pleasure. The captain, however, dealt with the officer in private. No painful scenes occurred then as they did later during the public celebration of the opening of the Kiel Canal in 1895 (a demonstration which was distasteful to me), when the French and the Russians behaved so badly.

they had taken leading parts in the wars of union. I was honoured by co-operation with these great-minded masters, and when I took over the Imperial Admiralty in 1897 I tried to co-ordinate the varied lines of thought which they had both followed, under more spacious conditions. For various reasons, however, the naval administration by no means prospered in the interim, but sank into chaos for nearly a decade.

## CHAPTER IV

### TECHNICAL MATTERS

1. The torpedo-boat branch. In Fiume. The elaboration of my method. State and private war-industry. The navy's system of supply.—2. Work *honoris causa*. The development of the torpedo-boat. Every warship a compromise.—3. Personalities.

#### I

SINCE I was twenty-nine I have had the good fortune to be employed uninterruptedly in positions of independence, among which in fact there was not one of those "soft jobs" that now and again fall to the lot of members of the General Staff. My rise is bound up with the development of the torpedo arm. Whitehead in Fiume had invented the automatic torpedo which brought within firing range those vital parts of a ship below the water line, which hitherto could only be attacked by ramming; it thus promised a revolution in naval tactics and shipbuilding. Stosch had introduced the fish torpedo over-hastily, and had bought large numbers of them before they were really serviceable for war. The use of the torpedo still constituted "a greater danger to the man who launched it than to his enemy." People were too optimistic about it, and, as is often the case with new weapons, had anticipated the change before the new idea was really practicable.

When Stosch realised this he asked for special reports in the autumn of 1877 from the chief of the torpedo section and certain of his subordinate officers, and these he read himself. My report drew his attention to me. In the winter of 1877-8



I was sent to Fiume to deal with Whitehead about the torpedoes, which we did not consider of any use. I succeeded in getting rid of half our order, which Whitehead sold elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

From May onwards I led the torpedo section as captain of the *Zieten*. I began, so to speak, with nothing at all, and often worked partly as a tinker with my own hands, making myself apparatus. When the Crown Prince and the Emperor inspected the navy in 1879 and 1880 I was allowed to give a demonstration of torpedo-firing, and the unexpectedly certain success of this helped to strengthen Stosch's position again, which had been shaken by the *Grosser Kurfürst* catastrophe.

I dealt with the torpedo section, just as I did later with all new inventions, whether airship, submarine, or anything else. I refrained from the premature adoption of new devices, but acted energetically as soon as I saw real possibility of development. I have always found this method to be the only right one. It was very often a difficult part of my duties to prevent myself, as Secretary of State, from being disturbed by the impatient throng of inventions which came rushing in from all sides during this period; but it was also a very important one if, with our limited means and in the short time, we were to set up a first-class navy instead of a museum of experiments. We were overwhelmed with immature inventions which had first to be sifted by instinct, so as not to fritter away and overburden

<sup>1</sup> On this occasion the threatening war between Britain and Russia in 1878 (in which I was ordered to support the Russians as far as I could) produced a peculiar impression of Hungary's relations with Austria. Whitehead, who was a thorough Englishman, refused to supply the Russians; the Hungarian Government under Tisza prohibited the export of torpedoes, so that we were compelled, on the recommendation of Austrian gentlemen, to try to take the torpedoes which we had already bought across the Austrian frontier, which was only half an hour distant, although they were German property. The Hungarians then set up Honved outposts, so that the matter had to be settled diplomatically.

the energies of the authorities. Once I was unable to put on the brake, and the success of the construction of the fleet was endangered by haste, which was our greatest enemy in the whole undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

In my work in the torpedo section I first set myself to perfect the technical accuracy which is necessary in everything connected with shipping, and which in all my work I continuously kept in view. The Whitehead torpedo was all right as far as the idea went; but it still had too much rough engine work, and consequently lacked the necessary clockwork precision. The same thing occurred in the case of the submarine, which likewise requires workmanship of the best quality. In Germany we were the first to obtain this workmanship, upon which efficiency in time of war depends, and that first in the torpedo arm; the English did not quite reach the high level of our torpedo firing even during the war. When I gave a demonstration of the Whitehead torpedoes before the Crown Prince in 1879, in spite of many weeks' preparation, it was still a toss-up whether they would reach the target or dash wildly out of their course. Fortune smiled upon us, but I afterwards said to Stosch that we must now get to work on our own standard of precision.

The Admiralty next approached the German factory of Schwartzkopff, which had been advertising so widely the

<sup>1</sup> An example of this. When wireless telegraphy came in it promised to fulfil a long-felt need in the navy for the transmission of orders from ship to ship at long distances. Everybody pressed therefore for its introduction on a grand scale—the navy, the firm directly interested in it, and of course the Emperor. And yet it was not ripe for use at sea, nor was the introduction of business competition at all desired. During my absence in America, however, its installation was carried through in spite of the opposition of my deputy. The consequence was that the necessary development came to a standstill for the time being; moreover, we had to spend a great deal of money quite unnecessarily on the installation, and had endless trouble with these technical difficulties. Naturally I got the blame and I was now attacked because of its ineffectiveness.

merits of its gun-metal torpedoes that the Admiralty wanted to give it a monopoly. I opposed this; in the first place because a limited company which has a monopoly easily pays too much attention to its annual dividends, and not enough to the development of the product; secondly, because I was convinced in this case of the advantages of steel over gun-metal; again, because in the tendency towards home-production that was growing in the bigger foreign navies, no foreign money would have come to Germany as a compensation for us; and finally, because the most important experimental work at sea could not be done by the firm, but was our own special prerogative. Thus I succeeded in calling into being State torpedo-workshops; the progress of the torpedo arm is indicated by the increase in its range, which only amounted to 400 yards at the time of its general introduction into the navy, but rose to 12,000 yards by the winter of 1915-16. The nationalisation of torpedo-production did not affect the opinion I held that State workshops are only suited for special and limited purposes, but that repairs are generally carried out better, and certainly more cheaply, in State workshops than in private concerns.

In order to avoid as far as possible the accumulation of expensive war material, I followed the principle when I was Secretary of State of keeping private industry, and contractors generally, prepared for the event of war. At that time I gave out our contracts, including victualling, clothing, coal, etc., on the condition that the contracting private firm made arrangements to proceed forthwith to an increased output in the event of mobilisation. For these preparations for mobilisation we had to pay rather higher prices in some cases. I have often been attacked for acting on this principle, but it was only by so doing that we were able to help out the army with 2,000,000 kilos of gunpowder up to the beginning of 1915. The army was supported far more than we were by State workshops, but it was not prepared for the enormous requirements of the world-war—and at that time

it had almost exhausted its ammunition,<sup>1</sup> and was saved by the navy from the gravest danger.

In addition to the military advantage of a mobilisation that was recognised as perfect, the navy system of supply had possessed the great economic advantage that we were able to keep the unused stores quite low in times of peace and consequently lay out to the best advantage the small amount of money which Germany could spare us; and further, if it came to the worst, we could rely on carefully considered peace-time arrangements, and were thus relieved of the danger of over-hasty war-contracts.

I have often been attacked in the Reichstag because of my attitude to private enterprise and contractors generally. Parliament begrudged the private firms the big orders, and, with one eye on the State-socialism of the future, inclined more to the principle of State factories. Even in future wars any overstraining of the state-mechanism or any check upon private industry would lead to the most dangerous crises.

## II

I mention here a small matter which I would not broach if the Revolution did not threaten to change so fundamentally our old conditions.

Schwartzkopff had explained to me the advantage which would accrue from the purchase of some of his shares which, as was to be expected, had trebled their value in consequence of the naval contracts. Naturally I did not buy any shares, and would have dismissed any official who acted otherwise. Our State always premises in its servants that nobility of feeling by which it had risen to greatness under the Prussian kings. I am reminded of the Finance Minister who arranged

<sup>1</sup> The competent officer at G.H.Q. told me as early as in October 1914 that the attack on Verdun was abandoned on account of the shortage of ammunition, since it was not desired to expose the Crown Prince's army to a reverse.

the purchase of the Prussian railways, and left his post in most unsatisfactory circumstances. The salaries in certain high offices were not in just proportion to their importance and the expenses they involved. When I was Secretary of State I had to draw on my private income at first in order to meet the calls my office made upon me. It goes without saying that our officials worked for the honour of the thing. With a minimum of expenditure we performed a maximum of creative work. Thus the State administration in the old Prusso-Germany was cheaper and cleaner than anywhere else in the world. After the squandering of State money, and the creation of innumerable sinecures, which are bestowed upon persons more for their politics than for their fitness for the posts, it is to be feared that the new State will not be like the old. The old German State has been weakened and broken by a period of mediocrity at a time of the greatest danger; but the German nation will never be lost so long as it does not lose the clean character of the old administration. The corrupt German is worse than the corrupt Italian or Frenchman, who at least never betrays his Fatherland.

The German cannot afford to abandon that uprightness which was the *palladium* of his old civil service, for he lacks the other political qualities which help to render almost all other foreign nations immune from the poison of corruption. Even during the last generation one could notice the harmful influence of the materialism which was penetrating into the upper classes of Germany, in the shape of a weakening of character, a diminution of that positive idealism which the German nation will always have to exert in the interests of its own self-preservation. For it is only by proud, unselfish devotion to the State that Germany can counterbalance the deficiencies of her geographical position, her bad frontiers, her limited area, her jealous neighbours, her religious differences, and her too young and too uncertain national sense.

As then chance gave me for my first important task the development of the torpedo *arm*, and was so kind to me that

we were able to overtake the performances of other navies in the same province, I was able to obtain at the same time an insight into the workings of the mind of a factory director. But I was glad when the torpedo *boat* brought me back to my natural field of activity, viz. tactics. In my whole career the line of development from the technical to the organising side by way of tactics has been repeated again and again.

Stosch opposed the torpedo boats, which had already been constructed in England. But when I was working out the first manœuvres at his orders in 1882, things went so well with our experimental boats, which were defective in those days, that Stosch began to take an interest in torpedo boats. Then Caprivi, who recognised in the torpedo boat a means of carrying out his strategic ideas, commissioned me to develop the torpedo-boat section. There was a great variety of opinions on the subject. Some wanted small coastal boats. I demanded sea-going vessels which could fight in the North Sea, and the struggle between the advocates of sea-going ships and those who supported the coast-defence scheme continued through all my activities down to the building of the submarines.

Even before the pattern boats, which had been ordered from various German and English firms, were completed, Caprivi asked me to devise suitable tactics with the older boats in the summer of 1884. Thus, the growth of tactics preceded the development of the more cumbrous technical side, just as it did later in the case of tactical work with the big ships in the 'nineties.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the boats which we had ordered arrived, the Admiralty having wrongly left to the discretion of the different firms a number of important considerations, such as sea-worthiness, cheapness, size, and so on. The firms were

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chap. VI. For the rest, I never shared this infatuation for torpedo boats, and pointed out to Caprivi that this auxiliary arm, which (like the submarine later) was bound by its very nature to become obsolete, could never be a substitute for a battle fleet, which was our real need.



therefore obliged to act without any military knowledge and to rely on their own methods; one aimed at cheapness, another at speed, and so on. But every warship is a compromise of different desires which can never all be fulfilled at one and the same time within the limits of the finished article. A definite standard of armament, fuel storage, accommodation, buoyancy, armour plating, speed, are all wanted with a given displacement; then there is a fight in the committees over a matter of 25 or 50 tons; and to satisfy everybody, one would soon have a 100,000-ton ship without having gained anything at all. Thus it is the strategic idea of the ship which must be firmly determined before anything else; in the nature of things, however, only the supreme naval command, and not the firm, can decide this.

The new boats proved to be either unsuitable or inefficient; we were involved in some danger with them in a storm off Norway. Caprivi discovered a way out of the conflict between the Admiralty engineers and myself, on the subject of the type of torpedo boat, by instituting in 1886 a Torpedo Inspection Board, which he handed over to me, and which covered all branches of the torpedo section. We elaborated the sea-going boat carrying guns. The fleet training, the dockyards, and the workshops were now controlled by one hand, which had its advantages at this stage.

### III

As Inspector of Torpedoes I had to report myself, along with other officers, to the old Emperor. He spoke with each individual in such a friendly and fatherly manner that everybody was deeply touched. Then he stepped into the middle of the circle, assuming quite naturally a kingly attitude, and reminded us in earnest words of our duty. It was all so simple that it touched the heart; one felt the mind of this man, who had the State before his eyes in everything that he did. One would have suffered oneself to be cut to pieces for him.



In 1887 Prince William, afterwards Emperor, went to England to attend the Jubilee of his grandmother, where he was coldly received, probably on account of the medical controversy regarding his father (*wohl schon wegen des Aerztestreits um seinen Vater*). I commanded the torpedo flotilla which accompanied the Prince, and which was to be paraded quite unnecessarily before the English. It was at this time that I got to know the Prince, who plunged with a passionate interest into everything connected with the technical side of the navy.

The next year Caprivi handed over the Admiralty to Count Monts. The latter had an undisguised dislike of torpedo boats, which was indeed shared by almost all the older officers of that time, partly owing to a natural distrust of everything new, and partly because younger officers were appointed to independent commands in the torpedo section at an age which they considered was not sufficiently ripe. At any rate, at his first inspection of the flotilla, Count Monts declared that the whole thing was mere show, which would be useless in battle.

Thereupon I asked the Chief of the Naval Cabinet for a command at sea, and further, that some restraint should be imposed upon Count Monts lest his prejudice against the torpedo arm should retard its development.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEW COURSE

Caprivi leaves the Admiralty. The fateful split in naval authority. Chaos. Memoranda. An "imposition."

WILLIAM II had sketched some types of ships when he was still a prince, and, as he did not come to the Admiralty, he had had a shipbuilder brought from the fleet for this hobby of his. As soon as he had ascended the throne he summoned the chief of the shipbuilding section to him. This disregard of a Minister was contrary to the old Prussian traditions, and gave Caprivi formal grounds for handing in his resignation. Caprivi wrote to me that he would not have suited the young Emperor for long; the Emperor did not like him, and only made him Imperial Chancellor later because it was thought that some strong man was needed against the Bismarck *fronde*. The real reason for Caprivi's departure was, however, that the Emperor wanted to divide the power of the Admiralty, in order to be able the better to intervene himself. Bismarck, who had been discomfited in his collisions with Stosch by the powers united in the hands of the latter, unfortunately favoured this splitting up of the naval administration (1888), which had a harmful effect even in peace-time, and was almost fatal in war.

In 1859 the supreme control of the navy was split for the first time, and the executive command was separated from the administration. The frequent friction which resulted from this division ended in reversion to the old system under Stosch in 1871. And now in spite of those previous ex-

periences, the executive command and the Admiralty were once more separated in 1888; in addition, a special Naval Cabinet was established and attached to the Monarch, and all three authorities were granted direct access to the Sovereign. The field was now open for move and counter-move, for three or four different naval policies.

There now appeared upon the scene a kind of Cabinet Government which had once before dug itself into Prussian history. If the Cabinet had restricted itself to advising the Emperor on the selection of the highest officials, and had left the responsibility together with liberty of action to the latter, then there would have been no objection to a Cabinet that was provided with some knowledge of human kind and character. As this condition of a triple responsibility developed, it was only in August 1918, when almost everything was lost, that the Admiralty and the supreme Naval Staff reunited in practice to form a supreme Naval Command, after they had been played off against one another for decades, and the intervention of the leader of the Cabinet was now abolished. The internal struggles and obstacles which hampered the practical work of the divided authorities during times of peace were naturally unknown to the general public.

If William II's burning desire to establish a navy had begun to be fulfilled in 1888, we might perhaps have attained our object before the grouping of the enemy Powers became so dangerous. The ten years lost between 1888 and 1897 compelled us either to inscribe a permanent "too late" on the aims which Germany's sea-power was striving for, or else to cross a political danger zone by proceeding with the building of the fleet.

In 1888, however, it was difficult for the Emperor to find suitably trained officers for the leading posts. Perhaps the navy was not yet old enough, and the success of Caprivi's efforts to exert an educated influence on the officers' corps could only bear fruit later.

After the short periods of office of Count Monts and

Admiral Heussner, Admiral Hollmann came to the Admiralty in 1890, a high-minded man who was, however, never quite clear as to the direction to be followed. Caprivi had worked according to a principle which was only half correct from the navy's point of view, but now there began a period in which decisions were taken which were absolutely devoid of principle and adapted only to the needs of the moment. It was the tendency during this period to bring forward demands in the Reichstag which were based not so much upon requirements as upon the probability of their being granted. Every fraction of a cruiser was disputed in the Reichstag, and the catchwords "zigzag courses" and "boundless plans," with which Eugen Richter worked against the navy in the Reichstag, were difficult to refute. Worse than this, every authority in the navy wanted and proposed something different. The aimlessness of it all was felt everywhere, and produced a chronic crisis. The confusion of opinions displayed itself, for instance, in the heterogeneous collection of vessels, from which one could not confidently expect any mutual co-operation in the event of war. In justice one must add that no navies at that time were at all clear as to how a modern naval war would develop.

After I had commanded the *Preussen*, and then the *Württemberg*, in the Mediterranean from 1889 to 1890, I was to have been made Director of Dockyards, but as the result of a remark made by Chancellor v. Caprivi to the effect that I should be kept in a position which would better prepare me for responsible command, I was appointed by the Emperor to be Chief of Staff of the Baltic Station in the autumn of 1890. There I had ample opportunity of observing the conflicts between the Executive Command and the Admiralty, both of whom were working equally badly.

In the spring of 1891 the Emperor was once sitting with us officers after dinner in Kiel Castle; the old Moltke was there too. At the Emperor's suggestion a discussion took place as to how the navy should be developed. The most

varied views were expressed in the usual fashion, and without throwing any real light on the subject. Being a junior captain, I kept out of the discussion. Finally, the Emperor said, "Here I have been listening to you arguing for hours that we must put an end to all this mess, and yet not one of you has made a really positive suggestion." The Chief of the Naval Cabinet, von Senden-Bibran, who had read one of my memoranda, nudged me encouragingly; I took the hint, for it was painful for me to hear the Emperor make this drastic criticism in front of the old general. So I described how I conceived the development of the navy, and as I had been continually jotting down my ideas on the subject, I was able to give a pretty complete picture without any difficulty.

The next day the Emperor got up early and walked for some hours with the Chief of the Cabinet, talking excitedly all the time, and drawing up a kind of "imposition" to be done by all naval officers who had taken part in the conversation.

# CHAPTER VI

## TACTICAL WORK

1. Commissioned to develop the tactics of the High Sea Fleet. My preparatory school for this in the study of torpedo-boat tactics. The "black company."
2. Training the High Sea Fleet. Line tactics. The squadron principle. The English in arrears.

### I

WHEN I was appointed Chief of Staff to the Executive Command in January 1892, and was personally commissioned by the Emperor to develop the tactical work of the High Sea Fleet, I had behind me a more thorough schooling in tactics and strategy than any officer in the navy. I was always attracted by the study of history; I was soon conversant with ancient and modern naval history, and, as a matter of fact, the insipidity of modern accounts generally sent me back to the original sources for my information. I also continued to study the history of land warfare, not from mere inclination, but in order to obtain a deeper psychological knowledge of my own subject. I should think I have read everything of any importance that has been written about Frederick the Great, and the Wars of Liberation of 1866 and 1870.

When I was a young gunnery-officer on board H.M. ships in the seventies I was fully alive to the changes wrought in our service by the development of engineering. I was all the time striving to get at the fighting value of it all, and I remember the delight which the first recognition of my independent method of work gave me, when a French captain gravely remarked on inspecting my battery: "Je vous vois

travailler pour le but final." The task which had been set me in 1877 of organising the torpedo arm had banished me, as I have already said, to a purely technical field of work, and the difficult and painfully exact task of developing inanimate material was less congenial to me, although, like mathematics, it trained me in method. I perceived, however, that the new submarine weapon, whose laws had to be discovered, opened up prospects for the militant qualities of the German nation to rival the larger navies of older and richer states. The precise methods of work which my mechanical experience had taught me soon stood me in good stead in my tactical experiments.

The special courses which I had arranged for the training of officers and ratings of torpedo craft during the winter months led us to consider the problem of single combat between ships. Very little methodical work had been given to this subject at that time. We also sought to develop the art of manœuvring vessels independently. I had excellent officers at my disposal, who transmitted all that they had learnt from us—and particularly our methods of work—to the other ships of the fleet. One special object of my manœuvre course was to teach the naval officers to act on their own initiative much more than had been customary, owing to fear of collision. Before my time the single ship had hardly been given any training in independent manœuvre, but had been straightway worked in squadron formation, in which each ship must conform to the others. It was my principle now to train the individual hoplites before forming the phalanx. This secured great certainty of movement, which attracted much notice later when I was able to proceed with apparent daring in command of the *Preussen* and *Württemberg* in the first operations with heavy ships in squadron formation; in reality my ability to do so was due to practice, but it was often wanting in the other ships owing to the weakness of their individual training.

Besides training the single ship for the duel, I was also



working upon the complicated co-operation of several units, when I was commissioned to work out tactics and organisation for the new torpedo craft. The great risk of collision had made not only us, but foreign navies too, nervous of real battle practice with torpedo boats. Countries governed by parliament have found by experience that it is almost impossible to hold naval manœuvres which really reproduce war conditions. But we overcame the nervousness of public opinion most effectually, and gained thereby an advantage in preparedness for war. In all the mishaps that occurred to our ships during manœuvres I supported on principle the officer concerned, but I also demanded the most stringent seaman-like caution at sea.

Whilst working out these fighting formations, I endeavoured to impress upon the officers that we were able by these means to find out practically everything that was wrong, but we were not certain to discover what was absolutely right for war; we could not therefore lay down any dogmatic rules. In view of all the incalculable possibilities of battle, the supreme tactical principle for torpedo boats was "Close up, and fire at the centre"; in other words, when the moment had come for attack, to stake everything on the safest shot; the torpedo that hit the enemy was the best protection against his gunfire. The second principle was more general; it bordered on strategy and ran as follows, "Act according to circumstances." This sounds simple, and obvious; but most persons in such situations prefer to act according to orders, instead of following their own responsible decision. If the senior officers believe themselves in a position to ensure success by their own directions, then this tendency, which has its drawbacks in a crisis, always leads to a flood of regulations and battle orders. There were times in the years leading up to the world-war when assurance of victory was far too prevalent in our fleet, and this always has the dangerous result of leading to spectacular fighting formations and showy manœuvres. After 1897, when

I was detached more and more from the fleet, to my great sorrow, I had no opportunity of effectively combating these growing dangers, although my own earlier work convinced me that I saw quite plainly the results of these methods. This weakness for the decorative side, and the drilling and polishing that it entails, tend to replace originality by mere routine.

Our work with the torpedo boats had helped considerably, even in Caprivi's time, to determine the development of the navy from the coastal-defence idea to the High Sea Fleet.

A special arm like the torpedo boat must be allowed, if it is to produce its best, a special status and comparative independence in the main body of the fleet. Later on, the torpedo boats were included in the fleet in somewhat too arbitrary a fashion, and attached to a cruiser; this had more drawbacks than advantages, at least as regards the use of torpedo boats at night.

I spent the eleven best years of my life in the torpedo section among "our black comrades, of the wild and daring chase." We were bound to our incomparable crews by enthusiasm and mutual comradeship in storm and danger. We officers of the torpedo section constituted a corps within a corps, the united spirit of which was everywhere recognised, but also envied and opposed. When I became Chief of Staff I took over the whole of the "torpedo crowd" with me, and so I had a body of experts at my immediate disposal. I tried to do the same later at the Admiralty, but there my wishes as regards *personnel* met with opposition in the Naval Cabinet.

## II

When I joined the Executive Command in Berlin in 1892 the necessity for improving the fleet training to meet the demands of war was perfectly clear to me. To this

end a corresponding organisation had to be created for the fleet before anything else, and the short-dated commissioning of ships in the summer had to be done away with, in favour of keeping ships permanently in commission. At that time the Admiralty was at work unwisely organising the whole navy on the lines of the army, in such a way as to transfer the centre of gravity of the navy to the land.<sup>1</sup> I prevented this, for it was only possible to give the fleet any tactical training with permanent formations which manœuvred and were composed in peace-time as they would be in war.

Soon after taking up my new duties I went to see the Naval Secretary of State, and told him that I would regard him as my leader in every way, but that he must give me a free hand with regard to the intellectual training of the navy. We parted good friends, but Hollmann did not really acquiesce in my request, and expressed the view that the Executive Command would have to go. At this stage of our tactical proficiency this opinion could only be vindicated if the Secretary of State himself took the tactical training of the navy in hand, as Caprivi had done when Chief of the Admiralty. Hollmann, however, had no intention of doing so, for he was completely absorbed by parliamentary difficulties. On the other hand, a series of exercises drafted by a commission was made official for the fleet and given binding force. But this new regulation contained nothing but evolutions, *i.e.* merely the movements of ships, so to speak, in empty space, the transitions from one "quadrille" to another. Real fighting value had no place there, nor could it have, since people were not clear

<sup>1</sup> On mobilisation, each vessel was to give up half its crew for newly commissioned ships, and to make up its complement with recruits. This would have meant the break-up of the whole internal organisation of the ship, and consequently the squadron formation which had been trained with so much trouble; and our readiness for war would have been destroyed. We should have had a crowd of ships with men on board, but no fleet.

as to how they intended to fight, whether in the manner of Nelson or Tegetthoff. They exhausted their imaginations in discovering and manœuvring in theory as many formations as possible, from which the Admiral was then to make his choice.

I replaced these "roundabouts" (*karusselreiten*) by the principle of first making it clear to ourselves how we had to fight in battle. The next autumn manœuvres in 1892, which were arranged to this end, resulted in a new quarrel between the Admiralty and the Executive Command, in the course of which (autumn 1892) the new regulation was replaced by one that I had evolved myself. To begin with, we improved the individual training of the ships, and then proceeded step by step.

It was only human that this intervention from above was not appreciated by the commanders and the squadron commanders-in-chief, and I was given the nickname "Master." Towards autumn we collected all the ships that we could muster in home waters, and formed a manœuvre fleet which operated under the personal direction of the Executive Command. As we arranged them in fighting units, regardless of the class of ship, we combined numbers of ships which had hitherto never worked in company. It could be said here, too, that men fought, and not ships. For the navy was so small that we could only establish large battle-formations and manœuvre them one against the other by scraping together all the training ships, mine-sweepers, and other simulacra that we possessed.

It was then that we began operations in larger formation, and without more ado we dropped a number of practice formations which had been highly esteemed until then, including the wedge and square. Between 1892 and 1894 we discovered our line tactics. The main feature of these was to keep the enemy in the centre of our line, no matter how he manœuvred. In addition we discovered our squadron principle. Until then there had been no theory of naval

warfare, and no certainty as to what number of vessels constituted the most effective squadron unit. Helped by the nature of our line tactics on the one hand and the success of our intensive training on the other, we fixed upon eight ships as the most favourable norm for formations fighting in a line; in the event of more vessels being available, several squadrons were formed which were to fight in a series of lines. Thus there arose out of our tactics a new organisation which later exerted a determining influence upon the Navy Bill. On the basis of our results I also reintroduced the old designation "Ship of the Line" into the navy.

I cannot avoid the impression that the real meaning of the squadron principle is at times not fully appreciated. The perfectly natural tendency of the Commander-in-Chief to lead the whole fleet as a tactical unit only meets the case in certain situations. On the other hand, it is frequently only a certain independence on the part of the squadron commanders that can produce the best results from the fleet. The larger the fleet, the more difficult it is to handle when concentrated. Its manœuvrings become clumsier, and the Commander-in-Chief is easily prevented by smoke, rain, and particularly the smoke from gunfire, from reviewing the position of the various units. This is the most important reason why we decided upon the squadron as the tactical unit, and thus gave the squadron commanders and the equivalent leaders of flotillas the right to act "according to circumstances." The full realisation of this idea is also connected with the endeavour permanently to adjust the organisation and method of the navy to the training of men who possess the gift of leadership.

Soon after us all navies proceeded to adopt some kind of line tactics and our squadron principle. Thus it may seem strange to-day that no navy in the world had yet formulated any definite principles at the beginning of the nineties, and that the "wedge and square" question, for example, still played a considerable part in the specialist

literature of those days ; whilst even the Athenian Phormio had overcome by his line the Spartans, who clung to their land ideas and formed a square at sea under Brasidas. Whilst we were discovering these things quite empirically on the "small practice-ground" by Kiel Bay, the American Admiral Mahan was simultaneously evolving them theoretically from history, and when I made the acquaintance of his book later, I drew his attention to this extraordinary coincidence.

The English seemed to me to be very behindhand in tactics at the time, a fact which was illustrated by the Tryon trial following upon the sinking of the *Victoria*. The truth of the matter was that the English had no need for tactics. The Battle of Trafalgar had removed all competition in sea-power, and from that day onwards the theoretical as well as the practical development of naval warfare came to a standstill, whilst the Balance of the Powers kept the science of war active enough on land. The British navy, with its overwhelming superiority, could shoot any opponent to pieces somehow or other. We were not in such a position. By our example, however, the English were once more compelled to work and to apply their minds again to naval warfare. At first the English troubled very little about the small German navy. Their attention was drawn to our work by means of official memoranda which were either stolen or taken from a sunken torpedo boat. About 1896 the British navy began to have the feeling that we were competitors, and since they began to regard us in that light, they have studied us and followed similar lines in their own manœuvres. They will never confess that they learned from us in this way. It is so, however, and we were quite aware, even at that time, that the British navy received the new spirit of its development from us. The fact that a navy which had practically no ships at all should lead the way in method, reflected Germany's position in the world. We had either to build ships or else give our ideas to foreigners.



We built the ships, and in quality of ships and tactics, but not in numbers, were actually superior to the English during the world-war, although England had long since recovered from her phase of tactical torpor and hazy manoeuvres.

Those years saw my greatest achievement, the infusion of a fighting spirit into the navy. But like everything else, the tactical and strategical work of my life lacks the stamp of final success. The unfounded prestige of the British navy robbed Germany's leaders at the beginning of the war, when the German navy had the best prospects of success, of the courage to let us make a bid for victory. The Battle of Jutland, interrupted as it was by darkness, was not fought to a finish. If it had been, there would in my opinion have been a prospect of putting quite a different face upon the history of the world. The bitterest fate has befallen the German fleet, and sailing out with it was denied me.



## CHAPTER VII

### NAVAL SCHEMES

1. Service publications. Sea-battle or cruiser warfare? The necessity of a fleet for Germany. Correspondence with Stosch.—2. Attitude towards England.—3. My 1895 plan of operations. Acquisition of Heligoland.

#### I

OUR tactical discoveries resulted of their own accord in a definite and desirable concentration of *matériel*. The activities of the Executive Command which had been laid down in "official memoranda" consolidated into concrete proposals for the construction of a High Sea Fleet. When I returned from the East later to take over the Secretaryship of State, I replied to the question, "What is going to be brought into the Reichstag?" with, "All that is contained in the ninth memorandum."

In spite of the tactical results of these official memoranda and their recognition by the Emperor, the Admiralty under Hollmann was still working for cruiser warfare; it even urged the Emperor in this direction and put forward the same views in the Reichstag, without any system at all, so that the Reichstag was just as unable as ever to understand what the navy was out for.

In the winter of 1894-5 a number of Reichstag deputies were to attend a naval conference in the palace at Potsdam; at first it was intended that I should report to them, but later the Emperor decided to address them himself. I learned that the Emperor intended to speak unreservedly in favour of cruiser warfare, and to influence the Reichstag in this direction. It happened that I had to report to the

Emperor for the Executive Command the day before, and I seized the opportunity to inform the Emperor of the contents of that memorandum, which represented the *battle* to be the aim and the centre of gravity of our tactical and organising development. The Emperor was vexed, probably because it meant disturbing the scheme of his address, and he asked me, "Why was Nelson then always calling for frigates?" I replied, "Because he *had* a battle fleet." At any rate the outcome of my representation was that the Emperor spoke about both cruiser warfare and battle fleet to the deputies the next day, with the result that they had less idea than ever of what was really intended. One portion of the Reichstag observed a distrustful and hostile attitude towards "personal naval whims"; Herr von Leipziger, secretary to the commission on navy matters, groaned quite openly to me that evening in Potsdam and said, "If only we knew which way they really want to go!"

In the autumn of 1895 I asked to be relieved of my office on account of new conflicts with the Admiralty. My successor was Admiral von Diederichs, and Admiral von Knorr took over the Executive Command, without bringing, however, any relaxation in the conflicts and chaos of these years. In December 1895 the Command handed in a memorandum on the necessary naval construction; I was commanded by the Emperor to give my frank opinion on this scheme, which I did both in writing and orally at the end of 1895.

Two lines of thought were emerging at that time: the *tactical* necessity for a *battle* fleet, *if* we were striving for sea-power and wanted to build ships to some purpose; and the *political* necessity of establishing a protecting navy for Germany's maritime interests, which were growing at such an irresistible pace. The navy never seemed to me to be an end in itself, but always a function of these maritime interests. Without sea-power Germany's position in the world resembled a mollusc without a shell. The flag had to

follow trade, as other older states had realised long before it began to dawn upon us. As *The Fortnightly Review* put it, both tersely and correctly, in 1893: "Commerce either engenders a navy which is strong enough to protect it, or else it passes into the hands of foreign merchants, who already enjoy such protection."

A certain freedom from care and misgiving, the predominance of internal economic and social matters, still obscured this necessity from the mass of the German people. The Emperor had realised it, and had been enabled to do so by his frequent visits to England, where both he and his family were practically at home. The efforts of the Emperor to interfere prematurely and too noisily in world-politics, and his inability to move in a world of realities—a difficulty which was felt quite clearly by his people—hampered his efforts to arouse in them an enthusiasm for the expansion of the navy. Indeed the idea of a navy was received with much suspicion among the people. The Germans were pampered by the good fortune which Bismarck's creation of the Empire and the sudden stirring of our long-repressed economic abilities had brought us, and they did not realise that our development on the broad back of British Free Trade and the British world-empire would continue only *until it was stopped*. We owed the growth of our physical and material strength to the growth of our industry. We increased our population by a million every year, which means that we acquired annually the equivalent of a province within the unalterable and narrow limits of our native soil; and all this depended upon the maintenance of our export trade, which for lack of our sea-power depended solely upon the favour of foreigners, *i.e.* competitors. It was as Bismarck said: we had "to export either goods or people." In the long run the decision to form a power at sea was only an attempt to keep German a population that was not increasing in its own colonial settlements, but in the workshops at home.

The question was whether we were not too late for the partition of the world, which was then almost complete; whether indeed that expansion to which we owed our place among the Great Powers was not artificially and permanently made impossible; whether this swift rise would not be followed by a terrible downfall. The "Open Door," which could easily be closed, was to us what their broad plains and inexhaustible natural wealth were to the other Powers. This, combined with our hemmed-in and dangerous continental position, strengthened me in my conviction that no time was to be lost in beginning the attempt to constitute ourselves a sea-power. For only a fleet which represented alliance-value to other great Powers, in other words a competent battle fleet, could put into the hands of our diplomats the tool which, if used to good purpose, could supplement our power on land. The object in view had to be the institution of a constellation of Powers at sea, which would remove the possibility of any injury to or attacks upon our economic prosperity, and would transform the treacherous brilliance of our world-policy into a really independent position in the world. In order to bring this home to the German nation, I considered that a process of enlightenment on a large scale was required, to be executed with the reticence which foreign jealousy demanded. The question was whether this should be taken in hand by the naval administration itself, failing any other more suitable organisation.

I should like to elucidate the train of my ideas in those days, by reproducing a correspondence that I had with my old master Stosch.

" KIEL, 21. xii. 1895,

" SCHWANENWEG 25.

" YOUR EXCELLENCY,

" I have the honour to request you most dutifully to inform me whether the following argument agrees with the views and the long experience of Your Excellency.

“ It deals in the main with the question as to whether a larger concentration of the maritime interests of the Empire is to be attempted than heretofore, and whether the Admiralty (*Reichs-Marine-Amt*) is to be selected as the centre of crystallisation. If I estimate correctly the policy that Your Excellency pursued in this matter as Chief of the Admiralty, Your Excellency proceeded on the above lines. Regarded from the historical point of view, it is the standpoint adopted by Colbert and Richelieu in their day, when they were engaged in extending the power and economic sphere of France in this direction. If this object were obtained for Germany, then the growth of individual interests would lead again to disintegration. Up to 1866 our maritime interests were completely prostrated; sea-trade, export industry, trans-Atlantic colonies, sea-fisheries, trans-Atlantic Germanism, the navy. All that survived of these had a ‘parasitic character.’ A great deal of this issue still remains. In my view Germany will swiftly sink from her position as a great Power in the coming century if these maritime interests are not brought to the forefront energetically, systematically, and without loss of time; in no small degree also because there lies in this new great national task, and the economic gain which is bound up with it, a strong palliative against educated and uneducated Social-democrats.

“ We cannot allow these interests to develop ‘with a free hand’ (Manchester-fashion), because there is no time left for such methods. Neither must our carefully planned procedure be in any way bureaucratic. The aforementioned interests can only be placed upon a sound basis by power, and indeed sea-power. Otherwise we shall lack the courage to draw cheques on the future. The ‘parasitic idea’ must be changed in principle for *civis Germanus sum*. One particular difficulty lies in the fact that the expenditure on military sea-power must be made opportunely and in full realisation of the economic advantages that will accrue. Narrow-mindedness and the shop-keeping spirit—which only considers the personal gain of the moment—must be added to this.

“ In spite of all this I believe that there is a growing current of opinion in Germany that is favourable to the idea I

have outlined. It will be the particular duty of the central authority to strengthen this comprehensively and persistently.

If the Admiralty is chosen for this task, there is the advantage of being able to begin with an official body which combines in itself greater maritime interests than any other single Government department, and, moreover, an authority whose greatness and right to exist depends primarily upon those maritime interests, *as the navy is only a function of these.*

“The question would then be : will such an amalgamation as this contain the danger that the other non-military maritime interests will be treated too much as secondary ? or *vice versa*, that the exclusively naval interests will suffer owing to the activity and advertisement of the others ?

“Further, as a fundamentally opposite standpoint has been adopted since 1883, and as the other interests have secured just treatment (which, incidentally, was sometimes bad) from other Government departments (Foreign Office, Home Office, Posts, the various Federal State Governments), is there still time and opportunity to strike out for this greater concentration, and its resultant greater development of the maritime interests ? ”

A short time afterwards Stosch wrote to me as follows :

“HAUS STOSCH,

“OESTRICH IM RHEINGAU,

“February 12th, 1896.

“MY DEAR ADMIRAL,

“I am sending you a question to-day. The anger of the English with us, as shown on the occasion of the Transvaal telegram, 1896, has its root in German competition in the world-market. As foreign policy in England is dictated solely by commercial interests, we have to reckon with the opposition of this island nation. This will crystallise as soon as these gentlemen succeed in assuring themselves of the antipathy of France and Russia, and we are beginning to feel uncomfortable again.

“All the English articles that I have read lately take the view that they would knock out Germany with one blow.



I have also put to myself the question how we could conduct a naval war with England with any success, and I now turn to you and ask you to answer this for me. I may add that I have drawn up a plan of campaign of my own, but as I attach value to your naval judgment, I am very eager to hear what you would propose. I hear from Berlin that your departure to the East (as Squadron Commander) has been delayed; they are thinking after all of reducing our naval forces there in the interests of those at home. So you have had time to busy yourself with big questions.

“Be so kind as to fulfil my request. Goodbye.

“Yours,

“VON STOSCH.”

I replied to this from Kiel on February 13th, 1896:

“YOUR EXCELLENCY,

“I have received your kind letter of the 12th inst., and hasten to reply to it. . . . Very urgent and unexpected business took up my whole time in Berlin. I should like to inform your Excellency in confidence, and only for your Excellency's immediate ear, that I have had an opportunity of vindicating in the highest quarter your Excellency's views on the necessary expansion of the navy, and there is hope that the thread will be taken up once more where it was broken off in 1883. Perhaps I shall be able to give your Excellency fuller details later. My appointment to Asia has become very doubtful, as your Excellency must have heard. For my own part I am very distressed about it. It was my burning desire to go out there, and it would also have been good for my nerves to have got away from this exhausting mental strain for a time, and to be right away from Madrid. I must now wait and see what fate has in store for me.

“With regard to the Transvaal question, I take the opposite view to the public and our political leaders, and consider that we have acted wrongly.<sup>1</sup> England puts up with a slight from America because the latter is a source of some anxiety to her, and more than anything else because

<sup>1</sup> By sending the Krüger telegram.



America is an unpleasant opponent, and Germany pays the bill because at the moment she has no sea-power of any weight. At the present time our policy is building on the army alone as a material basis; but the army is only effective on our land frontiers, and, in addition, only directly so through the pressure exerted from within. Our policy does not understand that Germany's alliance-value, even from the point of view of European States, does not lie altogether in our army, but to a great extent in our fleet. For example; suppose Russia and France are standing together in some matter against England. The assistance of our present fleet would be too small a factor to be of any importance. But if England formulates her policy on the model of Pitt, she will prefer our hostility to our strict neutrality. We are an extremely valuable asset in any circumstances, and in the event of our remaining neutral we should gain in the most extraordinary way as England's competitor. England knows this very well too. *Up to the present our policy has failed completely to grasp the political importance of sea-power.* If we intend to go out into the world and strengthen ourselves commercially by means of the sea, then, if we do not provide ourselves simultaneously with a certain measure of sea-power, we shall be erecting a perfectly hollow structure. When we go out into the world we shall run against interests everywhere that are either already established or to be developed in the future. This means conflict of interests. How then does the most skilful policy think to attain anything without a real power which corresponds to the many-sidedness of these interests, now that the prestige of 1870 has faded? Sea-power alone comprehends the many-sidedness of world-policy. Even if it does not come to war, therefore, we shall always come off worst politically. It must also be taken into account that England has lost some of her belief that we should send our army to fight for her against Russia. On the other hand England can make Russia very considerable concessions, in Eastern Asia for example, if Germany pays the bill. In this last fact lies the danger, if we become involved at the present time in a conflict which affects Russia, France, and England. Also even if we propose to say that we are not going to war for trans-Atlantic

interests, the other three States would not say the same, so we are continually working at a political disadvantage.

A great deal more could be said on this point. But I just wanted to show that I did not arrive at my conclusions about the Transvaal question of the moment without some reflection. As a matter of fact, I conceived this opinion the moment I had read the telegram to President Krüger in the newspapers.

“This telegram was not even skilfully worded, for since England possesses the right of sanctioning this State’s conventions with foreign countries—a fact which we cannot deny—we were not in the position to offer the Transvaal *our* help.

“This incident may, however, have its good side, and I should think that a much bigger row would have been actually useful to us, in the sense that it would have opened the eyes of our Parliament; firstly, to put a definite stop to the Anglomania of certain circles, and secondly *to arouse our nation to build a fleet* on the lines of memorandum IX. This estimate is actually to be included in the next Budget. The Government and the leaders of the Reichstag, to be sure, see no prospect of success. By representing unreservedly the military and political value of our present fleet, the Admiralty has at least discharged its obligation, and history will have to call other people to account.

“My view is therefore to create within the next twelve years a fleet which is in keeping with the requirements of the same, and whose strength shall not be far removed in essentials from that laid down in your Excellency’s first memorandum of 1872. . . .”

Jameson’s raid upon the Boer Republic and the Krüger telegram had blundered into the middle of this correspondence. The outbreak of hatred, envy, and rage which the Krüger telegram let loose in England against Germany contributed more than anything else to open the eyes of large sections of the German people to our economic position and the necessity for a fleet.

But whilst German public opinion hailed the Krüger

telegram with joy and vented itself in repeated philippics against England during the next few years, I considered the Krüger telegram itself, and all the ensuing challenges to England, to be both regrettable and dangerous. They betrayed a widespread ignorance of England, of her power and of our impotence. The attempt to form a sea-power, which was difficult enough in itself because it was undertaken so late, was further endangered thereby, although England's isolation at that time and her difficulties with the Boers obscured from the eyes of the people the danger zone which we had to pass through in building a fleet.

I still maintain to-day that the effort to work our way through to real world-political freedom by the construction of a fleet could not be left untried. The German people will not lack occasion during the decades following the world-war to test the truth of this, and to feel what it means to be left to the mercy of the Anglo-Saxons. Any person who is convinced that we were altogether unsuited to become a sea-power in consequence of our historical backwardness, and that we ought to have accepted the guardianship of Great Britain from the outset, must naturally condemn my reasoning in those days. If I had not had faith in the great future of the German nation upon the earth, I should never have possessed the strength to build it a fleet. So far I may have been deceived, although I am convinced that this attempt to attain world-political freedom would have succeeded if our policy had observed greater caution in the one direction and greater energy in the other. With other leadership we had well-founded prospects of asserting ourselves in the world-war. But if people had *not* wanted to build the fleet, but to go the way of renunciation from the 'nineties onward, then we should have had to slacken trade and industry of our own accord; we should have had to start once more the stream of emigration, and to have allowed our foreign interests abroad to go to rack and ruin. Then, as Lichnowsky says, we should have had to leave the

field to the "Anglo-Saxons and the sons of Jehovah," and to have contented ourselves with our old reputation of being the salt of the earth, the fertiliser of mankind. It was, and is, an illusion, however, to think that the English would have treated us any better, and have allowed our economic growth to proceed unchecked if we had had no fleet. They would have certainly told us to stop much sooner. Anybody who knows the English could have no doubt of this. The cry for our destruction in the English press of the 'nineties was not by any means the only sign that the irksome but impotent German competitor would be struck down at the first safe opportunity. The German considered it his *bona fide* right to spread himself peaceably over the world and outflank English influence everywhere, and in general he did not sufficiently appreciate the feelings of the man in possession who looked upon him as an intruder. Moreover, people in Germany had a wholly inadequate conception of the peculiar nature of English power and of its ability to encircle Germanism morally and materially, until the world-war revealed the truth.

### III

The plan of a German battle fleet was evolved without any idea of a war with England. It would have seemed madness both politically and strategically to have entertained the possibility of a later attack upon England. Before 1896—that is, under Caprivi—the popular idea was, as I said, to regard England as the naval complement of the Triple Alliance against France and Russia. There was also no reason at that time to draw up defensive measures against England. The plan of operations which I drew up in 1895 has the "two-front" war in view, and reckons in all its details upon a neutral England. I started on the assumption that we were to open the war against France not as a cruiser war, but with an engagement at sea. This is the origin of

our construction of a battle fleet, but the unexpected demonstrations on the part of the British navy at the beginning of 1896, as well as the trade jealousy which was breaking out more and more openly, were naturally bound soon to add an English front to the French one. After the Krüger telegram the English put a flying squadron in commission against us. This brought a new point of view into our ship-building deliberations, and caused Stosch to draw up the plan of operations for defence against England which he had discussed privately with me. The first official plan of operations against England was not drawn up by the Naval Staff until the beginning of the twentieth century.

How wide of the mark was this charge that England made against our navy, and how fully we were occupied in our work on the "two-front" war, is shown by our attitude towards the treaty which gave us Heligoland in exchange for Zanzibar in 1890. The navy laid little importance on the acquisition of Heligoland. As a matter of fact I had wanted Heligoland as far back as 1870, and had said so in a letter to my father which contained a kind of first navy scheme, but the possibility of anchoring there, which was open to a French squadron in 1870, was now no longer to be feared since we had torpedoes. We never thought of the value of Heligoland, however, in a war with England. The island's importance for naval warfare did not really arise until I decided, daringly enough from the engineering point of view, to make a harbour out of the island (1906), which would make its cliffs a base for our naval forces and would render more difficult a close blockade of our coast.

Caprivi's reason for acquiring Heligoland was therefore not so much its military importance, which we hardly took into account, as the desire to put us on good terms with England.<sup>1</sup> The considerable concessions which he made in Africa for

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact the navy greeted the new possession with mixed feelings, as the fortification of the island deprived the navy of sums which were excessive for those times.

the improvement of an "eyesore" on the German coast aroused some indignation in Germany at the time. Personally I never put the value of Zanzibar very high in 1890, because the successful development of German East Africa must necessarily attract trade past the island to the mainland.

I had already been chosen for the Secretaryship of State at the time of that correspondence with Stosch. But when Hollmann obtained a vote of confidence in the Reichstag, Prince Hohenlohe hesitated to make a change of *personnel*. At Easter 1896 I received my appointment as Chief of the Eastern Asiatic Cruiser Division, and incidentally the good fortune to obtain one more glimpse of Germany's interests overseas before I took over the Admiralty and began building the fleet. I took with me from Berlin the commission to seek out a place on the Chinese coast where Germany could construct a military and economic base.



## CHAPTER VIII

### TSINGTAO

1. Need for a German base in China. An impossible choice. With the Russians. Tsingtao, not Amoy.—2. Form and extent of the lease. Tsingtao is kept under the Imperial Admiralty. The “Empire” of the navy. Economic development and pioneer work in civilisation.—3. Germans abroad and the Navy. Securing German sentiment abroad.—4. Sea-charts—The high school in Tsingtao.—5. The loss of Tsingtao.

### I

GERMANY took a leading part in the opening up of China to the world's trade, but she could never depend upon the Manchu Government to understand the fact that Germany had a friendly interest in the preservation of China's independence. Apart from everything else, the lack of a base hampered us, because the sole factor of power which protected German labour and made any impression upon the hostile authorities was our flying squadron, and the existence of this depended upon the Hong-Kong docks and consequently upon the favour of Britain. If German trade was ever to cease being a go-between for English and Chinese products, and to begin putting German wares on the Asiatic market, it needed its own Hong-Kong just as our squadron did.

The three places suggested to me were Amoy, a thickly populated little island with a treaty-port north-east of Hong-Kong, the desolate Samsah Bay farther to the north, and the Chusan Islands on the eastern tip of China near Shanghai. Tsingtao (Kiauchow), of which there had once been some talk owing to Richthofen's recommendation of it, had been “dropped,” I was told, because it lay too far north and off



the great trade-route ; moreover my predecessor in office had in 1895 declared Tsingtao useless. Besides this, the Foreign Office and the Admiralty were influenced by political reasons in their preference for Amoy ; they feared Russia would object to an establishment in the north, and the British had a right of pre-emption in the Chusan Islands.

The statements of numerous engineers and merchants, as well as my own reading, led me to the conviction, even before I had seen them, that all the three places suggested to me were unsuitable and that, apart from treaty-ports and Chusan, there was only one place for the German, who had once more arrived too late, since the British had searched out the whole coast as far back as the 'forties, and that was the unset pearl Tsingtao. A base must be useful to the fleet, it must promise economic prosperity and offer possibilities of defence. My chief demand was capacity for economic development ; it did not seem advisable to me to establish a purely military base.

When I inspected Samsah Bay some time later I found a narrow entrance with a dangerously strong eddying current ; green islands which lay in the gigantic bay turned into dangerous reefs when the tide was on the ebb. The desolate expanse of water was surrounded by mountains which could only be crossed with pack-mules. How was this fever- and typhus-ridden bay ever to compete with Fuchow with its half-million people which absorbed the trade on the River Min, not far off on the other side of the mountain !

The Chusan Islands were as little suited for defence as Samsah Bay or Amoy. Above all, however, they lay off Shanghai just like Heligoland off Hamburg. Trade passed by them. There was the probability of complications with England, moreover, if we went for them.

Amoy, an English settlement, which we had no right to take, promised but slight economic advantages. It was still an export-harbour for coolies to Manila ; its tea trade was falling off ; its important geographical situation with regard

to the monsoons, which had been so important for sailing ships, had depreciated more and more through the introduction of steamships; the whole place was on the down grade.

In Tsingtao there was a possibility of building fortifications. There was an enclosed bay; the northern climate was in its favour. The absence of a waterway and the presence of a poor, over-populated province as its hinterland did not deter us, as there were overwhelming signs of unusual scope for development. All information pointed in the same direction. In short, if Tsingtao was not to be included in the number, I saw myself faced with an impossible choice.

One day during a walk on the beach at Chifu I met Lieutenant-Commander Braun, my old flag-lieutenant, who was in command of the *Illtis*. He and I had worked together for eleven years, and he had been my right-hand man on the Baltic Station. We were thoroughly in sympathy, and he understood me immediately; he looked over my preliminary plans, and the next day he came on board saying that he felt as though scales had fallen from his eyes. I was glad of his opinion, for it was the only reliable one that I could get on the matter. I told him that I would write out an order for him to go to Tsingtao to investigate and report.

He went, and on the way was caught by the typhoon and went down with the *Illtis*. I was now compelled to send the sailing-orders to Berlin which had contained the order for Braun to inspect the Bay of Kiauchow. I said to myself that I must go a step farther, and, although I should have preferred not to arouse attention in view of the European rivalry, I proceeded myself to Kiauchow with the flagship *Kaiser*.

Previous to this I met in Chifu the new ambassador, Herr von Heyking, who was on the same mission as myself, with his wife. I invited him to a private interview on official business, and soon noticed that I had made a false move,

because his clever wife, afterwards author of *Letters which did not reach him*, had an important share in her husband's work. Heyking reported that the Kaiser told him at Potsdam that now he had sent out his best ambassador and his best admiral, surely the pair of them would come to some conclusion, and had asked him what he was aiming at; whereupon Heyking had replied, "At Amoy." I asked the Ambassador, "How could you name a place which you don't know?" and he answered, "But I could not leave his Majesty without a positive answer."

Thereupon we agreed not to make for any definite place without personal conviction, and I wrote down the points upon which we were agreed. Each of us was to examine the different localities with the means at his disposal, and we were to come to a decision between us after I had had my ships overhauled in the Hong-Kong dock in December (this dock had always to be booked nine months ahead), in order to be ready to take possession. I then proceeded to investigate Tsingtao, and from there went to Vladivostock to let my crews recuperate in the north. Here I met an old friend from Fiume, the Finn Virenius, who was in command of the Russian flagship. Whenever I met him he always took me to lonely places, which my German mind did not at first understand; but once, when Admiral Alexiev, who was afterwards Governor-General of Manchuria, was visiting me and I treated Virenius as a friend, the Admiral asked in a strange tone, "What, old friends!" whereupon Virenius turned pale and from that moment he ostentatiously avoided me. So Alexiev distrusted his own flag-captain! On another occasion I had invited the international society and the *élite* of Vladivostock to dinner on board, when I received news from Berlin that the Czar had been made a German Admiral. I raised my glass and drank to the Czar; the French Admiral who was present and his suite remained cold, but the Russians were forced to take it in a friendly way.

Alexiev was a pronounced Francophile. In spite of this fact I should have exposed myself to ridicule as a naval officer if I had not frankly admitted in conversation the need for a German naval station. Alexiev tried to divert me to the Chusan Islands, which was quite comprehensible from his point of view, for then we should have been permanently thrown into the balance against England out here. I received reliable information that the Russian navy had considered the acquisition of Tsingtao, but had abandoned the idea as superfluous and even inconvenient for Russian interests. I learnt the same from Peking, but also that the Russian ambassador there was meditating claims to Tsingtao in spite of its rejection by his navy. Heyking and the Berlin officials were continually feeling about for the line of least resistance, and expected to find it in either Amoy or Samsah. The Executive Command even reverted to the idea of the Chusan Islands, and for a short time the exchange of the Cameroons or Samoa for this group was under consideration. I gave warning against a Chinese repetition of the Transvaal friction between Germany and Great Britain in the event of our settling in the neighbourhood of Shanghai, and I reported on Tsingtao as being the only place in question if we were bent on acquiring a base in China.

At the end of November I received orders from Berlin to remain off Amoy, to cancel the dock, to keep the detachment with me, and to be prepared for action. In reply to my astounded inquiry, Heyking wired back that Berlin had asked whether an understanding had been reached between him and me; he had replied, "Yes, Amoy"; China's declinatory attitude on railway questions gave us a free hand for taking action.

I refused all responsibility for this choice. Apart from everything else, any action would have had to be undertaken with ships that were not in the best trim. We should easily have reduced the miserable Chinese fortifications of Amoy with their Krupp guns and a garrison of a

few thousand men ; the taking of the populous town was a more serious matter ; but the most important consideration was that if political ill-feeling arose between us and England, we might be refused the use of the dockyard, and then we should be left helpless, with ships in need of repairs upon which Germany's reputation rested in this part of the world.

Days passed, and at last the order came that I was to go into dock when I thought fit. Amoy was never mentioned again. The report, in which I had to reveal the whole situation after the sinking of the *Iltis*, had burst in upon the conflict of opinion in Berlin ; the Emperor had summoned to him a man who knew the place and who corroborated all that I had said. Later, the technical information of the hydraulic engineers, whom I asked for to be sent to Tsingtao, was regarded by the public as the starting-point for the acquisition of Kiauchow. When my successor, Admiral von Diedrichs, hoisted the German flag there at the end of 1897, the Russians brought forward their legendary right of " first anchoring " (on the strength of which England could claim not only Tsingtao, but the whole world, because Englishmen had at one time or another anchored everywhere). The purpose of this was not to create serious difficulties for us, but to obtain sundry advantages for Russia by means of diplomatic claims pitched as high as they dared. It is obvious that the Russians would have preferred to push us farther south into the English sphere, and were not pleased at our establishing ourselves in the vicinity of Peking, where they played the principal rôle at that time. They gave way before the firm attitude of the Emperor.

## II

While I was in Eastern Asia I had already worked out the form of the lease, so that it looked as little as possible like



forceful intervention, and allowed the Chinese to keep their countenance; I drew up the lease-treaty in its final form with Herr von Holstein in Berlin. As Secretary of State for the Admiralty I had from now on (1898) to proceed to win over our newly acquired possession from within and to justify our step by means of peaceful education. The main point was, with a moderate expenditure of capital, to discover sources of wealth of which the Chinese themselves did not suspect the presence, and with a big flourish in this small compass to show what Germany was capable of doing. The sixteen years of our labours in Tsingtao, which have remained a torso and have been robbed of the far greater development that we had in view, have left an indelible impression upon the eastern hemisphere. In comparison with British Hong-Kong, which was fifty-five years older, the development of this desolate fishing place to a town of 60,000 inhabitants and an important sea-port, in spite of strenuous competition, was almost tempestuous, and yet it was in every way sound.

The extent of the territory was defined exactly according to our needs. I recommended that only so much should be taken as was necessary for future fortification and the expansion of settlements and factory sites. The whole of the leased territory was expropriated by us. I had had experience in Eastern Asia of the great disadvantages which had resulted from unrestricted land speculation in the European settlements out there. This is a matter which is also worthy of study at home. We had to make up our minds forthwith as to Tsingtao. I therefore bought the land from the people at its then value, perhaps slightly dearer in order to reconcile them; this was a detail in view of the prospective rise in values there. The people could remain on the land by agreement as long as they wanted, provided we did not need it. In addition we had an extended sphere around Tsingtao, the so-called neutral zone, through which we could march troops, and consequently we

kept a hand on the immediate neighbourhood during the disturbances in Shantung.

I insisted, on principle, that Tsingtao should not be put under the Colonial Office. If the enterprise was going to prosper it had to be left in the hands of one department. The navy had immediate military interests there such as base requirements—quarters, dockyard, harbour, etc. It was better to avoid friction with a separate colonial administration. As we had assumed responsibility for this Eastern Asiatic base, it was my opinion that we were better suited to push on its economic development. In the same way I had declared in my letter to Stosch that the concentration of all maritime interests in the hands of the Admiralty was only desirable temporarily until these interests were fully developed, and I considered it possible that Tsingtao, once it was “ready,” would detach itself from the Admiralty automatically. But the time had not come for this. The bureaucracy was not altogether friendly to our little empire. The Foreign Office showed a certain jealousy; the consul who was swiftly dispatched to Tsinanfu took care that our influence should not extend to Shantung.

I share in all essentials Carl Peters’ criticism of our original colonial administration. Their initial failure is doubly regrettable because the German as such possesses in a high degree the qualities which go to make a good colonist. He also knows how to keep the natives satisfied. I remember that Lettow-Vorbeck was greeted as a deliverer by the natives when he crossed into Portuguese territory. In any case our colonies would have developed much more favourably in many respects if they had been connected from the very beginning with the military authorities at home. This would naturally have been too great a burden for the navy itself. It was only when the Navy Bill had become law that I wanted to leave my successor the task of getting to close grips with the construction of bases abroad. The Colonial Office gave no thought to these, although they were a neces-



sary condition for the development of a possible cruiser war, and above all for the linking up of "Germanism" abroad. But apart from this, how easily could something have been done for the defence of German East Africa if only more thought had been given to it in time of peace! The navy has indeed given both work and blood for the other colonies. For Tsingtao we could draw upon the navy for a large number of engineers and officials, whom we could send back again if they did not prove suitable, while the Colonial Office was only a bureaucratic headpiece. We were in a position to build the harbour and lay out the town. Our crews worked in all parts of the leased territory; we could maintain naval conscription, and all the troops we needed there (one naval battalion) were adapted to naval conditions; we had doctors who were accustomed to the tropics, and who were experienced in constructing hospitals, etc. Thus we did not feel ourselves fettered at every step by the Imperial Treasury and the Reichstag, as would have been the case with the Colonial Office.

In earlier days there had been a steady trade with Kiauchow Bay, but this was paralysed by the silting-up of the harbour. Since we were able to make use of reefs for the construction of an inner harbour within the bay, which was itself protected against heavy seas, this project was carried out at a comparatively small cost. Quays and docks were then built which we could have extended at our pleasure. Tsingtao began to become an import-harbour for the petroleum from the Sunda Islands, which was urgently needed in China. A splendid impetus was provided by the Shantung coal alone, a much-coveted commodity in Eastern Asia. Our own coal deposit in the protected area was of fundamental importance. Just when war broke out the smelting of the ores from Poshan was secured for Tsingtao. I effected this because Tsingtao was protected against local disturbances by our absolute rule. The iron-foundries which were to be erected with steel and wrought-iron works facilitated the settlement of industrial

undertakings. No iron-works in the whole of Eastern Asia or Western America had such prospects; the iron and steel market there would have passed into our hands, and this increased economic importance of Germany must necessarily have improved our political position, and have reacted upon all other branches of German export.

The increase in value of Tsingtao was also to be expected because there was not a single natural harbour along the whole of the neighbouring coast, and the possibility of a favourable railway connection was bound to make Tsingtao the outlet for Peking, and indeed—a fact which I saw from the first—for the railway line to Moscow via Irkutsk, which was the best connection between Europe and Eastern Asia as well as with Australia. The Shantung railway opened up the neglected hinterland of Tsingtao. Unbounded possibilities of economic prosperity lay before us.

The risings in China compelled us to carry out the so-called Boxer protection, the walling-in of the town area to an extent of 5 kilometres from water to water. Thus we avoided direct touch with China and prevented these disturbances from affecting us, to the great satisfaction of the rich Chinese who flocked to Tsingtao. In contrast to Hong-Kong the Chinese were settled in a special quarter, a concession to the Europeans which we might possibly have been unable to maintain as regards the well-to-do Chinese. The natives soon had confidence in our jurisdiction, and their town, to which we had given a high degree of self-administration, prospered.

The climate was comparatively good; bathing became a great feature of life there. We combated fever and typhus successfully by erecting waterworks, and the pestilences which devastate China from time to time were kept in check by the sanitary cordon along the Boxer wall. We also improved the health of the community by afforestation on a large scale. Our plantations became a model for the whole of China, where it had never been believed until then that cleared

forest could be replanted. The Chinese had cleared the forests to the last twig, and the rains made great ravines in the land. We too found it very difficult at first to make our afforestation successful on a soil that was devoid of humus. Its ultimate success however, encouraged the rise of other plantations. This protection of forests so impressed the Chinese that they began to study the subject quite keenly themselves. We established tree-nurseries and instructed the natives, with whom we thus got into continually closer touch. Round about in the neighbourhood we also taught the grafting of fruit trees, which was still foreign to the Chinese; they came in crowds to get the grafts from us, and the fruit culture of Shantung increased. The first modern abattoir in Eastern Asia, which we erected in Tsingtao, started our meat export-trade.

We endeavoured to keep on good terms with the Chinese authorities. The more reasonable among them came more and more to the conclusion that the occupation of Tsingtao was a blessing for them. The Chinese recognised us and made perceptible advances towards us. Perhaps they began to rate us higher than the Anglo-Saxon because theirs too was an old civilisation. I am not of opinion that we were at all behind the Anglo-Saxons in actual achievement before the war, not even from a colonising point of view, nor even in Africa, where perhaps the administration might have been carried out on broader lines. I do not like to assume that we ought to give credit to the Anglo-Saxons for any sort of world-mission which we could not probably have done better ourselves had we only possessed the material means. The German had still something of the upstart about him; he was not equal to the Anglo-Saxon in self-reliance. But all that we did was so methodical and sound, that in spite of the many orders from above which were issued for the sake of appearances, our achievements even penetrated to spheres which the English regarded as their domain (such as colonisation), because we had German diligence behind us.

The rise of Tsingtao was at all events a "steeplechase," particularly as it promised to increase in geometrical progression. The Germans in China gradually began to settle in Tsingtao and to regard the town as a centre for all that was German.

### III

The navy had given its heart to "Germanism" abroad ever since Stosch at the very beginning of his activities established the aim for the fleet of getting to know the world and particularly Germans abroad. How their national pride had suffered during the period of our impotence! During the war of 1870 only one German, Herr Siebs, of the Siemens firm, dared to acknowledge his fatherland in English Hong-Kong; most of them followed Herr Schwarzkopf's example, who changed himself into Mr. Blackhead. Outside Europe, "Germanism" has stood on its own feet in the Latin States of South America only, although that mistaken rescript of von der Heydt in 1859 actually crippled emigration thither, in the interests of North America, with the paternal intention of providing for the future welfare of the German emigrants, who were, however, lost to us henceforward. When Count Bülow proposed in the Ministry in 1900 to abolish this rescript, there were still some voices raised in favour of its preservation.

Many millions of Germans who emigrated were lost to us both morally and actually, and enriched those countries which were afterwards our worst enemies. Without past and present German labour the Entente would never have succeeded in inflicting upon us our present humiliation; one of the bitterest features of our position.

If the absorption by America was unavoidable in itself in view of the conditions which greeted our emigrants there, the manner and the speed with which this giving up of nationality was accomplished were due to our poorly developed

national sense. It was with sad feelings that I witnessed an enormous torchlight procession in New York of 14,000 German ex-soldiers, all in their prime, in honour of Prince Henry. If the question of nationality was ever broached with these people, the answer was generally: We think of Germany as our mother, but America is our wife and we must stand by her. Still less pleasant experiences were to be had over there. The ideals with which the home country had endowed them were quickly forgotten for the sake of the material advantages of American life. A professor belonging to a good German family, who had been a lecturer at a German University, was once taking me over Harvard University. He had only gone over to America a few years before, but he told me that he had already become an American citizen. The manner in which he said this did not make a pleasant impression on me, and I availed myself of an opportunity to attach myself to another American gentleman for the rest of the visit. Quite against my will the ex-German must have sensed the impression made upon me by his remark, for he said to the naval officer who was accompanying me: "Your Chief seems to wonder at my becoming an American citizen so soon, but you will understand, for I have been made a professor here sooner than I should have been in Germany, and so I must be grateful." It was obvious that what this gentleman had brought with him from Germany had quite gone from his mind. I mention such examples, and I can remember many of them, in order to characterise the lack of national pride, sentiment, and obligation which is fatally inherent in our people.

With these experiences and impressions of the German tendency in my mind, celebrations and the unveiling of monuments, of which there was no lack with us, always left me cold. In keeping with the national character which they brought with them from their homeland, the 10,000,000 North Americans of German origin have watched Germany go to her ruin, without lifting a finger. How different is



the case of the Irish, and yet it cannot be maintained that Ireland has done more for the moral welfare of her emigrating children than Germany. To my great grief I heard the Swabian dialect round about me in the Tabernacle of the city of the Mormons, and listened to a missionary, who had been sent into the "land of the heathens" to get converts, describing certain parts of Germany as particularly fruitful for his labours. Almost all over the world one found oneself grieving for one's own nation in spite of its great achievements, and whilst Germans abroad were generally swayed by personal interests, every Englishman became almost as a matter of course an agent of the "Foreign Office" as soon as English interests were at stake. A beginning had been made, however, just before the war to turn to account the rich capital which we possessed in our Germans overseas. With the growing strength and dignity of the German Empire, and particularly with the rise of its sea-power, even "*Germanism*" abroad began to feel itself once more a qualified and pledged member of the great body of our State in blood and civilisation.

The Germans who had gone overseas were scattered over the world in such a way that it was much more difficult to keep alive German interests abroad than was the case with the Anglo-Saxon, Spanish, or even the French emigrants; moreover our representatives never gave the matter anything but the most perfunctory attention. In many cases they failed to realise that even the most scattered members of a great nation should not abandon their nationality. I will not countenance the malicious saying, that many of our official representatives abroad feel the presence of other Germans to be a nuisance; but I must say of the navy that it was on the average much more zealous in linking up German sentiment and instilling into it pride of the homeland. Wherever there was a German colony we worked to strengthen the national associations across the sea. The most varied opportunities were taken for holding Germans together: we passed

over all class differences ; this was much easier to do in Eastern Asia than anywhere else, because there was no servant-class among the Germans there. Divine service brought us together. On the Emperor's birthday everybody who spoke German was invited ; all possible kinds of people were to be seen on board that day. Out there ties of language and blood are much more binding and all frontier lines disappear ; the Austrians everywhere reckoned themselves among us, and even the Swiss too. Our merchant shipping, which was formerly only too ready to ingratiate itself with other merchant services, was also made more national by these efforts of the navy.

I should like to illustrate how the naval officers' corps performed this service to "*Germanism*" by quoting from a letter written to me on my birthday, March 1914, from South America by the Captain of the *Kaiser*.

" . . . At any rate I am more convinced than ever that it is necessary to send the ships on foreign service, as much for the officers and men, as it is for the ships themselves ; if this is not done the navy is bound to become more and more stereotyped—I can find no other expression for it. But bigger things are also at stake. There is so much German blood abroad which must be kept German and reinvigorated. Why should not the time come when this blood should pulsate again ? not to form dependencies, but to take effect in the development of the race and to establish natural outlets for our mother country, without which we must ultimately stifle at home. Then we can also allow emigration to continue again. The Brazilian does not colonise, he has no energy, and leaves the land a wilderness. The race will not develop there until the country is filled from without. Embassies and consulates, however, don't win back "*Germanism*" or quicken German blood, and schools even can only preserve it in cases where the family retains German sympathies. This work can only be done by us, for it needs a strong patriotic voice and a striking symbol which can inspire them with enthusiasm."



And again the same correspondent writes to me in 1915 from the midst of the tragic inactivity of the navy, as follows :

“ . . . Only the navy can bring to a conclusion the great work of restoring the essential character and nature of the German to their rightful place in the world. The navy is made to carry out into the world the national strength which reposes at home upon our monarchy and our strong army ; it was born for the people out of this idea ; I read it in all letters which I still receive now and again from South America ; the joy over the growing German spirit and over the linking up of everything that is German even where it seemed already lost. And behind it all the thought that when peace has come again, our ships shall return to tie inextricably the knot of German sentiment.”

In this way that which I had endeavoured to plant in the navy began to take root, and it became more and more effective as a pioneer of “ *Germanism*,” the less the fleet was compelled to waste all its youthful strength in home waters. When war broke out I saw that the immeasurable prospects of our world-power, and consequently our fate at home, depended on our coming out of the war in a strong position as against the Anglo-Saxons. Those values abroad which have been destroyed by the war could only indeed be fully replaced by victory. But even if we succumbed with dignity to superior forces and fell in honour, the German name could preserve its respect in the world. The future of Germany overseas, and our whole artificial and yet so indispensable position in the world, depended upon whether people could remain proud of the fact that they were Germans. Nothing was more beneficial to the commercial prosperity of the Japanese in our time, or of the Germans after 1870, than proved strength and valour.

The world still had room for many Germans who would make their way as such, and not as hired slaves or deserters to foreign nations, so long as their national honour was too dear for them to sell it. A longer state of peace, or even an end

of the war which left us as a whole nation, would have made up for our coming so late on the scene. If we had become a nation, respected as an equal by the rest of the world, of which there was a chance, and if the home country had then become so full of people that we were compelled to send some away, they would have remained German across the seas and would have been an addition instead of a loss of blood.

The bulk of those politicians who directed the Empire's policy at the fateful hour had not been trained to look beyond the range of European diplomacy, and never felt the stir that was going through the still plastic mass of Germandom.

They scarcely understood what was at stake in the war, and how much depended for all of us, but particularly for our workmen, on German prestige being raised and not lowered in all corners of the earth.

#### IV

It would have been of the greatest value to us if we could have advanced the German language in China—a very difficult task, because it is inferior to English in many respects as a business language. One means by which England has spread her language over the whole world is the sea-chart. England performed a great task for civilisation when she surveyed nearly the whole of the ocean. In the last century practically every ship that sailed the sea used English charts; others were only used within narrow local limits. Our merchant shipping used to sail by English charts, even when German charts were to be had. I proceeded therefore systematically to produce a German series of charts. We already possessed charts of our own waters which were executed with greater thoroughness and exactness than the English, but they had several peculiarities to which our sailors were not accustomed. So I got into touch with our seamen, ascertained their likings in all details, even as to the form and the kind of paper, and we

succeeded ultimately in producing a series of charts which was not only adequate, but even superior to the English. Then we tried to provide charts for big stretches of ocean running into hundreds of miles ; one of them was the voyage from Germany to Eastern Asia. I wanted to do something for the dissemination of our language and the strengthening of "*Germanism*," and this was one of my reasons for this undertaking.

With the object of giving the Chinese the benefits of civilisation, we founded a high school in Tsingtao ; we also had in mind that it would pay from the economic point of view if we introduced our civilisation to them. I was no stranger to the idealist standpoint that it was our duty to disseminate knowledge, but my real motive in all this was to set up for us more sounding-boards in the Far East by this extension of our labours. The high school was provided with a middle school for Chinese as a sort of sub-structure. We had to get to work quickly, as otherwise the English would begin to compete with us. On this account we decided quickly and opened the high school before the middle school could have had time to train the students sufficiently. That was a secondary matter, however ; we had to go ahead. It was not the Foreign Office, but Professor Otto Franke, the Chinese expert, who at my instigation conducted the negotiations with the Government at Peking, and he arranged in ideal fashion that Chinese Government Commissaries should co-operate in our examinations. By this means our examinees obtained the right to an appointment in China just as though they had passed a state examination. In this way we should have directed a stream of young people towards China who spoke perfect German, knew our institutions, and were acquainted with our products. We paid particular attention to the science of medicine, which, as it is above all competition, is more qualified than anything else to do national pioneer work for Germany.

Our colony became more and more a depository for the

German import-trade. We began to organise a model exhibition of German products, a first-class advertisement which we could never have erected in an English settlement. Standing as we did on the threshold of China, we afforded an insight into our own economic and intellectual achievements, yet we respected the character of the country, accepted and offered hospitality, and returned trust with trust like a "royal merchant."

## V

We had everything, except a policy which would have enabled us to give permanency to this experiment, this test of Germany's worth. I did not see Tsingtao again after 1896. but I built into it so much anxiety and affection that the loss of it hurt me almost as much as physical pain. With a garrison of only about 3,000 or 4,000 men, the place as we had fortified it could have been held indefinitely against the Chinese and a long time against the French, the Russians, and even against the English. But even with great expenditure of capital we could not have built a fortress to resist the attack of a Japanese army. There is no medicine that will enable one to hold out against the whole world.

The idea of procuring a strong base in Eastern Asia, to which Germans could gravitate, was right in itself; but a necessary condition was that we should be on good terms with Japan. In spite of our protest against the Peace of Shimonoseki in 1895, there was no dangerous shadow between us and Japan, so long as Russia kept us as it were in the neutral zone. Even after the collapse of the Russian Eastern policy in 1905, there was no reason for a discerning Japanese policy to wish us out of China. But after 1905 we ought to have done everything in our power to correct the mistake of Shimonoseki.<sup>1</sup>

So far as I had any influence in this direction—and it was

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XIV.

not much—I have constantly worked for a good understanding with Tokio. As far as I know, the German Government never made any serious attempt to obtain assurances from Japan with regard to the neutralisation of Eastern Asia. I was not really surprised by the Japanese ultimatum. But I assumed that Japan must really desire our presence in China on account of her grave opposition to America, which must become acute sooner or later. As Tsingtao had been declared a free port from the beginning according to my own desire, because I thought that we as owners of the place would never come off worst, Japan did not do a bad business there; the only thing that could make our presence seriously unpleasant to her with this free trade was her hunger for coal.

The Japanese ultimatum arrived on August 15th, 1914, and its brusque wording is said to have been very similar to that of our Shimonoseki Note of 1895. Upon the advice of our ambassador in Tokio, Count Rex, Bethmann was inclined to accept the ultimatum. I was responsible for our not replying. If we had given up Tsingtao without a fight, we should have lost it in any circumstances; the alliance with Japan, which we had to try to bring about, was only imaginable, however, if we preserved our honour in Eastern Asia. Even now it will stand us in good stead that we upheld the idea of "the fulfilment of duty to the utmost" until the enforced end of our Chinese colonial experiment. The unconditional surrender of Tsingtao would have seriously depressed public feeling in our national struggle for existence. Japan has not done us any more harm as our enemy than the swallowing of the insult would have done. Besides, in August 1914 no one could say how long the war would last; at that time indeed the army was full of confidence in victory. We had to reckon on the possibility of holding Tsingtao until the end of the war, which might come soon. An attempt to hand over Tsingtao to America, in exchange perhaps for the Philippines, was bound to break down.

We had developed the Boxer line into a solid rampart

which only included a few works, with trenches and barbed-wire entanglements, and the sea-front was armed with a few Krupp cannon which we had got for nothing from the Taku forts for use against insurgents. The last shell was fired when Tsingtao surrendered. When 30,000 of the enemy began the general assault, which there was no artillery to ward off, it was only a question as to whether the remainder of our garrison would allow themselves to be slaughtered by the enemy in the unfortified town. The governor acted correctly in capitulating. In the streets of the captured town the Japanese searched a long time for the 12,000 Germans that they expected to find there. There were only 2,000, with perhaps 1,500 conscripts and volunteers who had faithfully found their way thither from the German official and commercial circles in all the settlements in China.



## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE ADMIRALTY

1. Once more : foreign service fleet or battle fleet? The reason why we needed a battle fleet.—2. Preparation of the first Navy Bill. My method.
- 3. The reasons for the form of the Bill.

WHEN I was recalled from Eastern Asia in the spring of 1897, and was travelling home across America, I was informed by inquisitive American journalists in Salt Lake City that Eugen Richter had already begun a campaign against me in the press as the future Secretary of State. At that time I was not sufficiently versed in parliamentary ways to play off against my inexorable opponent the fact that he attacked me before he knew anything about me.

I relinquished my command with a heavy heart, for I had told the Emperor in 1895 that in my opinion the construction of the fleet could only succeed by way of legislation, and that universal experience showed that, to get this through the Reichstag, a "gift of the gab" was needed, which I did not possess, together with a knowledge of political routine which had not been included in my hitherto purely naval career. When I arrived in Potsdam in June 1897, the Emperor told me that everything was ready for the navy campaign; I only needed to give my consent. During my absence the Emperor had had a draft-bill drawn up by a committee, but in my opinion this was of no use. I have never seen anything constructive done by committees. They are more adapted for criticism. Their sense of responsibility evaporates, and they are not fully alive to the enormous difference between an idea and its

materialisation. In this instance, however, the Emperor was very much impressed by the work of his committee. I asked for a few days to think it over.

The fundamental idea of this draft centred round *a foreign-service fleet*. Now there were only a few States left in the world at that time, such as Hayti, etc., in which any infringement of our rights could be corrected by foreign-service cruisers without giving rise to a serious conflict. States like the Argentine already had modern warships at their disposal, so that every foreign-service cruiser would have to be supported by a naval force in home waters, if it was to fulfil its purpose as an outpost. Moreover we had not one single foreign base. Throughout my whole career I have always had to oppose two ideas, especially beloved of the lay mind—the idea of a special coastal defence,<sup>1</sup> and that of a cruiser fleet for foreign service. The world-war has proved that the best *coastal defence* is a *battle fleet*. As to the cruiser war, I replied to the Emperor at the time somewhat on the following lines: As a thorough-going cruiser war and a war on the high seas against England and other great States is altogether excluded by our lack of foreign bases and by Germany's geographical situation—the foreign Admiralties know this quite well—what we need is a battle fleet which can be stationed between Heligoland and the Thames.

I had just had occasion to see in Eastern Asia the deceptive props on which our position in the world rested. I had heard from many sides of the difficulties which the English were putting in the way of everything German, and of the progress of the “made in Germany” boycott, and the anti-German agitation aroused by the Krüger telegram. Germans were being pushed out of the administration of

<sup>1</sup> Even a soldier of the rank of Field-Marshal von der Goltz, when Inspector-General of the Engineering Corps, brought forward plans for the fortification of the coast, and I was given the trouble of rejecting a proposal to dot the coast with armoured towers, which were altogether unnecessary both militarily and politically, in view of the existence of a battle fleet.

Europeans' settlements, in which they had hitherto taken part, and also out of the English companies and wharves. I had experienced myself how our Eastern Asiatic squadron could be rendered useless on the slightest provocation by the refusal of the dockyards. In those days, the middle of the 'nineties, one noticed how the world was beginning to go more quickly. German trade, the "Open Door," could no longer be protected by flying squadrons; we had to increase in general power all round, *i.e.* to qualify ourselves for an alliance with the Great Powers. But "alliance-value" could only be achieved by a battle fleet. One single ally at sea would have sufficed in the Great War to enable us to fight with the most favourable prospects for the freedom of the seas.

The first thing therefore was to create for ourselves a fleet which would give us "alliance-value"; and the second was a corresponding alliance policy, and the avoidance of all friction in foreign policy before this end was achieved. These were the two objects for which we had to strive amid the aggravated political conditions of the age. I viewed with anxiety the rash provocations in which German public opinion was indulging against England at that time. I also viewed with anxiety the advice dictated by the recklessness of the Naval Executive Command to the Emperor during the Transvaal crisis. In the same report therefore in which I presented my navy scheme, I asked to be consulted in the use of foreign-service vessels, on account of the political nature of such actions. The Emperor and the Executive Command granted this; but they did not act up to it afterwards. The Emperor agreed immediately to my navy scheme, with a change of mind that surprised me, and in June 1897 there disappeared finally from the draft scheme that foreign-service fleet, which would certainly have had a short life in the war. I must say that I did not myself regard the prospective battle fleet as a panacea without an alliance with another second-rate sea-power; but it was

the necessary step towards our qualification for alliance, and consequently, the only tangible way of attaining that independence with regard to England which was unanimously and justly demanded in Germany at that time, but which was unfortunately too often taken for granted in a way which was not compatible with practical politics.

## II

My predecessor, Hollmann, used to read all the documents relating to his office personally, and he was consequently inundated with them. I restricted myself to the preparation of the Navy Bill, and left the current business to my deputy. In Ems and St. Blasien, where the bronchitis which I had brought with me from the tropics was to be cured, I gathered round me the men whom I had chosen to work out the Navy Bill with me. The long parliamentary experience of von Capelle, his critical mind, his logical style, were a happy balance to my disposition, which was more inclined to follow intuition. He was less a fighter than a brilliant financier; together with Dähnhardt, who carried on urbane intercourse with the Reichstag deputies, he controlled the financial side of affairs, which, in view of the poor state of the revenue, was a tricky art in itself. While I generally went straight for the goal, von Capelle saw the difficulties and objections as well as the different ways of overcoming them; he was always the first to find the weak points which our opponents could take hold of, but he was not perhaps so good with the *imponderabilia*. He was just as indispensable to me for the parliamentary side of the work as the fiery von Heeringen was for rousing the people; von Heeringen conducted the moral mobilisation of the masses in a very tactful way.

My method of work always had Nelson's "We are a band of brothers" for its motto. Ever since my first commands, I have had to deal with things which needed to be regarded

in perspective from many sides, and the man who does not feel himself a Napoleon, able to leave his personal stamp upon everything, is bound to make for himself a bundle of faggots which is more difficult to break than a single twig. If one is faced with a big task, one must avoid trying to do everything oneself. I had noticed with Caprivi that he did too much of his own writing; once he had written something in his fine, even handwriting, it was difficult to make him change it; he was, so to speak, in love with his own reasoning. I have also noticed this danger in myself; I therefore kept myself in check all the more, so that I could face more dispassionately that which was right in itself.

One of the reasons with which it has been attempted to justify the breaking-up of the homogeneous—so to speak, sovereign—Admiralty, and its partition into different departments, was the assertion that the whole management of the navy was too much for one man. This theory, which was at the back of the mistaken Imperial Command, thus put the reins into the hands of a monarch who had to govern much more than the navy! But it is wrong to say that it would be difficult to set up a many-sided authority. The main thing is that one should have a sense for everything essential, and leave all the rest to reliable assistants. At all costs one must secure the assistants that one has chosen for oneself. I left time for what was essential, and should have liked to do much more.

There is nothing I have been so careful to avoid in organising as taking a fundamentally false step. For, once a wrong course is taken, it is difficult to discover the original mistake; only the symptoms are evident, and precedent and interests are soon established on the mistake. Therefore, one should never lay organisations on the table of the House, but they should be allowed to crystallise round a given point. One must also leave open the possibility of dissolving the organisation without any disturbance if flaws appear, for in general in radical changes one only recognises the advantages before-

hand, and seldom the disadvantages. In organisation, formal logic is of less account than the quality of the soil and of the seed. We therefore did not drive the Navy Bill with a tight rein, but as slackly as possible.

Personal attendance in the Reichstag, in fact appearance in public at all, was not congenial to me. I felt that the less one spoke in the Reichstag, the better it was and the further one got, especially in a province so delicate for foreign policy as mine. I believe that I have never given any occasion of offence to any opponent either at home or abroad in this way. A certain shyness of the bustle of public life may have influenced me. It is true that the reproach was raised later against me, that the naval debates, both in full session and in committee, were either too "tedious" or too "glib," and that this was probably due to some secret arrangement behind the scenes. We certainly did have confidential talks with the party leaders. But our chief secret was the absolutely meticulous elaboration of every Bill, so that it convinced everybody and was unassailable. The success of this was due to the working methods which I had formed during my labours in the 'seventies, by which I first formulated the idea, then consulted as many other people as I could, and then once more made an exhaustive examination of the final result. Capelle, as a rule, first wrote down the matters deliberated by us. Later on, the practical test of our technical and organising work, as well as the careful elaboration of the Navy Bills, gave Parliament more and more confidence in us as time went on. Any other means than our thorough methods would never have won for us our successes in Parliament.

In the Prusso-German government system of my day the Ministers of State generally preferred to exhaust themselves with silent, often unrewarded, departmental work, rather than parade themselves before the public eye. The strait-jacket of parliamentarism, which has been put on the German people by international theorists, who have no understanding of organic growth, and no regard for the judgment of history,



will soon teach them to praise the old times as the good times. The new rulers will wonder at the expertness of the old Government, and at the amount of loyal work achieved instead of empty talk.

Every word of the draft Bill was altered quite a dozen times in our discussions at St. Blasien. I used to "revolve" the matter, an expression about which I was often teased. I always insisted upon the principle of giving each collaborator the greatest possible independence. I used to urge my departmental heads never to regard questions from the point of view of their own department solely; each of them was to criticise ruthlessly, just as though he were the king and had to decide the whole question alone. There is always enough of the detail work left to do. Thus I demanded of the engineer that he should learn to judge from the military standpoint as well as from his own, and *vice versa* from the officer. There is nothing that I consider more irrational than for the superior officer to emphasise his position in discussion. There always comes a point when one person must decide; but I may say that it rarely came to a command at the Admiralty; we almost always came to a mutual decision, in the course of which I as *primus inter pares* spared my collaborators the feeling of being overruled, and left them the pleasure of achievement, while at the same time I myself did better and more than if I had wanted to see myself in everything. The transference of the brusque word of command (which is necessary in face of the enemy) from the ship to the office and to big undertakings, the working with mere creatures who obey mechanically, the painful delimitation of departmental views, cripple the sense of responsibility and the capacity for making decisions, which are the chief requirements in military authorities. When one knows oneself what one is out for, then one can get the best out of one's subordinates, and in modern organisations one can refrain from personally dragging the whole burden forward a few feet, and instead one can help each of

one's assistants to advance his own part of it an inch or two.

The field of my activities accustomed me to great versatility. The more complex an organisation becomes, so much the more does the head rise to differentiated functions, and if it is to keep itself clear it must not try to take on any of the work of the members. I gathered round me specialists, who had on the whole a good store of knowledge, and I gave my attention to the correlation, so that if necessary their different specialities could be made the most of. I always furthered in every way the promotion of independent characters, but the longer my experience, the more definite was my striking discovery how scarce really creative minds are, and how characters which have proved themselves in secondary positions can fail completely in higher ones. In making promotions it is difficult to avoid from time to time making a bad captain out of a good lieutenant.

### III

I was assured at the Admiralty that we should never get the Bill passed as it was. Our most reliable friend in Parliament, the National-Liberal leader, von Bennigsen, was also of the same opinion, and he advised us to try yearly credits. I insisted upon this Bill, however, quite resolved to attempt what was said to be improbable, and to resign in the event of failure.

I needed an Act which would protect the continuity of the construction of the fleet on different flanks. The circumstance that was most in the Bill's favour was that it intended to make the Reichstag abandon the temptation to interfere each year afresh in technical details, as they had hitherto done when every ship had become an "exercise in debate"; and the Admiralty had not demanded what was most important in reality, but that which they could get passed in the interplay of changing majorities. But with party coalitions which treated ships as objects of compensation, it was im-

possible to construct such a naval armament as was demanded by a generation of patient uniform growth.

I could never discover, however, how to ward off the frequent interference of the Emperor, whose imagination, once it had fixed upon shipbuilding, was fed by all manner of impressions. Suggestions and proposals are cheap in the navy, and change like a kaleidoscope; if the Emperor had spoken with some lieutenant-commander or had seen something abroad, he was full of new demands, constructing, reproaching me with backwardness and even thinking to rouse me by means of warnings; apart from several threats to resign, I could only secure the continuity of development, which was the fundamental factor of success, by means of legislation.

The third side from which chaos threatened and against which I needed an Act of Parliament was *the navy itself*. Whenever it is a question of special knowledge, opinions diverge. When I became Secretary of State, the German navy was a collection of experiments in shipbuilding, although not so varied as the Russian fleet under Nicholas II. Even the English navy is the same to a certain degree, but there money is of no importance; if they had built a class of ships wrongly, they just threw the whole lot into the corner and built another. But we could not permit ourselves that. Besides, in England they understood better that opinions change, whilst the doctrinaire German immediately declared that as he had built something wrong, *anathema sit*. The German more readily believes in a system if it is put before him as such. I was quite aware of the minor defects of the Bill, but I had no choice if we were going to make any progress under the existing conditions.

The form of the Bill had the very great additional advantage that it enabled us to proceed in a more business-like fashion and arrange matters more economically in many ways, since we were able to look a long way ahead. And economy, which entailed a great deal of previous calculation, was a bitter necessity for Germany's navy.

By the beginning of 1897 I had a conversation with von Miquel, then Prussian Minister of Finance, mainly for the purpose of discussing the general political side of the Navy Bill with him, and he gave me a few general assurances of support. An article in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 5th) came as a great surprise to me therefore, when, inspired as it was by Miquel, it made out that the Bill, which was desirable in itself, was not feasible at the moment. Progressive development was required in the navy, but it had to be achieved without infringing the parliamentary rights of the Reichstag.

This publication was undoubtedly inadmissible, and dangerous to the Bill. But I avoided an open conflict. Miquel was against the Bill, as indeed was the whole Ministry, but he did not want to put up any open and firm opposition to it on account of the Emperor; he was trying, therefore, to appease everyone, and yet to dissuade me from my plan by representing its difficulties. When he saw, however, that I was determined to stand firm, he became more friendly.

The general scepticism among the leaders and the indifference of the mass of the people made me think of canvassing for Bismarck's support.

## CHAPTER X

### WITH BISMARCK

1. Launch of the *Fürst Bismarck*. My first visit to Friedrichsruh. A fatal beginning. Bismarck on the balance of power at sea.—2. Drive through the Sachsenwald.—3. The last visit to Friedrichsruh.

#### I

IN June 1897 I had suggested to the Emperor that the next ship to leave the stocks should be named *Fürst Bismarck*. I knew that Prince Bismarck or his family cherished the wholly erroneous suspicion that a ship bearing his name had been intentionally struck off the list at the time of his resignation. By this means I hoped to soften the estrangement between Bismarck and the Government, and I wanted to take the invitation personally to Friedrichsruh in the autumn, and to seize the opportunity to obtain the old Prince's blessing for the Navy Bill.

The Emperor agreed after some hesitation, but sent an official letter on his own account to Bismarck inviting him to the launch of a ship, without, however, giving the name with which it was to be christened. He anticipated by this act of grace, as he generally did, the pleasure which such occasions always gave him, and intended to give the Prince a surprise. Bismarck's reply was to the effect that he was too old for such things. Then I received the command to straighten up the situation, which had got somewhat muddled.

I wrote to the Prince requesting an audience of him, in order to report on the intended procedure of the navy. The letter came back unopened, with a note to the effect

that the Prince did not receive any letters which did not contain the sender's name plainly written on the envelope. In reply to a second letter I was told that I could come.

It was the custom to call at Friedrichsruh about midday. I was met by Count Rantzau, whom I knew personally; I begged for his support. When I entered the house the family was already at table, the Prince sitting at the head. He got up, cold but polite, very much the *grand seigneur*, and remained standing until I had taken my seat. He was tormented by violent neuralgic pains, and kept holding indiarubber hot-water bottles to his cheek; he ate grated meat, and could only speak with difficulty. After a bottle and a half of champagne he became more lively. When the simple lunch was finished, the Countess Wilhelm Bismarck lit his long pipe for him, and the ladies left the room. The atmosphere was sultry. Suddenly the great eyebrows contracted, he gave me an annihilating look and growled, "I am no tom-cat that gives off sparks when it is stroked." I am not generally very quick at repartee, but I could not remain silent in the face of these almost desperate prospects, and so I replied, "So far as I know, those are only black cats, your Highness." Count Rantzau put in eagerly, "The Admiral is right, only black cats do that." The atmosphere became less electric. I delivered my message, and he answered that he could not come to Kiel and put on his uniform and spurs, and that he did not wish to appear before the public as a ruin. In order to get something positive out of him, I suggested that perhaps one of his daughters-in-law could appear at the launching ceremony. He replied that I must ask them; he left it as a matter of form to their personal decision. Thereupon I brought out the real object of my visit.

I set forth my plans and endeavoured to persuade the Prince that this was no mere whim on the part of the Monarch, although I had had many such to deal with in the course of recent years; and impressed upon him that it was our intention to carry out the Naval Programme approved by the



Reichstag in 1867, but recast and brought up to date. We must have, I said, a certain measure of political sea-power in view of the new times that were coming. This had not been so necessary in the 'seventies because the immeasurable fame and brilliance of great names had helped us over any difficulties in those days. Now, on the other hand, a foundation of real power was necessary, for example, in view of our position in an Anglo-Russian war, which had to be seriously reckoned with. In conclusion I added that I had come to obtain his blessing for the creation of a definite naval power such as our tactical experiments showed to be necessary.

From Bismarck's first few words it was evident that he did not want to hear anything of the military side of the matter. He had no high opinion of big ships, he said, and he agreed with his friend Roon that a large number of small ships were needed which could swarm like hornets round the big ship. I did not succeed very well in making him see that the heavy ship represented a concentration of force and had the advantage in certain positions; he objected that this would be all right for a pitched battle, but he stuck to his "hornets," and wanted to push on the service abroad by the aid of a number of small ships which could be sent all over the world. My admission that this would be important if we could get a few bases abroad, led to an outburst against Caprivi. He said that apart from his old friend Roon, who represented a department of the Naval Ministry until 1871, he had never agreed with any of the Naval Secretaries. Caprivi, he continued, had always come to him in the Wilhelmstrasse, like a wooden ramrod; and what else could one have expected from him? While he, Caprivi, was a lieutenant in Berlin without extra pay for twenty-two years he had seen the well-to-do cavalry officers, whose fathers had landed estates; and when he became Imperial Chancellor he thought he could rub this into the landed proprietors. Moreover, the dissolution of the Insurance Treaty with Russia was the most terrible disaster. In the event of an Anglo-Russian conflict, Bismarck

declared, our political position was summed up in the phrase "Neutrality towards Russia"; Russia wanted this, and it was sufficient for him too.

The possibilities suggested by me that a new Pitt might not desire such a neutrality, and might prefer our hostility, and further that other constellations were just as conceivable, and that only a respectable naval force could qualify us for an alliance with Russia and other Powers, were thrust aside by Bismarck almost angrily. He said that taken as individuals the English were quite worthy people, but they were shopkeepers in politics. If they came, we should slay them with the butt-ends of our rifles. He was totally incapable of understanding that a close blockade would overcome us.

The old Prince was obviously thinking of the agrarian Germany of 1870, and the political England of 1864; and he no longer understood the powerful position of the British world-empire in 1897. Altogether, he was following his own preconceived ideas rather than giving himself the trouble to take in a new scheme. In the main, however, he agreed with me: "There is no need for you to persuade me that we need a bigger navy." He confirmed his approval of my procedure in writing later.

The memoranda of the former French ambassador in Berlin, Baron de Courcel, show how responsive the Prince was, in his best days, to the idea that we ought to cultivate a certain definite value as an ally against England. When the colonial aspirations of Germany and France seemed to converge in 1884, the Prince sketched to the Ambassador the possibility of a naval covenant between the two continental neighbours. The Prince is said to have expressed himself as follows on that occasion<sup>1</sup>:

"What I am aiming at is the 'restoration of a certain balance of power at sea,' and France has a great part to play in this matter if she is ready to enter into our views. There

<sup>1</sup> *Neue Preussische (Kreuz-) Zeitung*, August 20th, 1918.

was a great deal said at one time about the European balance of power, but this belongs to the eighteenth century. I do not believe, however, that it would be out of date to speak of 'a balance of power at sea.' I do not want a war against England, but I should like to make her realise that the navies of the other nations can establish a counterpoise to her at sea, and compel her to take other people's interests into account if they combine. But England has got to accustom herself to the idea that an alliance between Germany and France is not outside the bounds of possibility."

Bismarck himself would probably have been the only man who could have brought about a reconciliation with France. As this reconciliation, however, was not effected, the ageing man became alienated from these views. He no longer felt how strongly this diplomatic dependence on Russia, which he demanded (and the necessity of which was quite clear even to me), required as a foundation, in view of the altered international situation, a naval "balance of power" policy and the power of offering an alliance at sea. In view of the British hostility towards us which had revealed itself unsparingly since 1896, the question of power was now: How could we, huddled together as we were on our over-populated soil, preserve peace with England without capitulating to her trade-jealousy, or, if England resolved to bottle us up, how could we survive a war with her? Neither of these problems could be solved without a fleet, or by a foreign-service fleet, but solely by creating a battle fleet, the military potentiality and alliance-value of which must make it difficult for the English to pick a quarrel with us. "A new epoch had begun," as the old Prince said as he looked for the last time at Hamburg harbour, when, overwhelmed by the enormous activity which had developed there since the post-Bismarckian era, he thought of the easy-going old Hamburg of the days when it was controlled by the English.

## II

After we had been sitting about two hours at table, the Prince asked me to go for a drive with him through the Sachsenwald. He never rested in the afternoon. There were big bottles of beer right and left of us in the carriage, which were opened and drunk; it was not easy to keep pace with his powerful constitution. So that he could speak freely in the presence of the coachman, the Prince used a foreign language, and as his nature combined delicacy with forcefulness, he chose the English language, which he assumed would be most familiar to me as a sailor, and which he himself spoke excellently. He was unsparing in his criticism of the Emperor, but did not mind my objecting to his strong expressions; as an officer I had to take the Emperor's side. He told me how the Empress Augusta had worked in 1848 for the abdication of the King, and the renunciation of the right of succession by the Prince of Prussia; how as leader of the Right in the Chamber he had replied to the deputy von Vincke, who proposed—at the instigation of the Princess—a Regency of the Princess Augusta for Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, that, if such a motion were introduced, he would formally propose that the mover should be arrested; how the Princess then interviewed him once more in Potsdam, and declared, violently slapping her thighs meanwhile, that she was only concerned for the interests of her son, and how the latter, who was waiting in an alcove in the corridor, came up to him weeping, with outstretched hands. He spoke with affection about the Emperor Frederick, who had always supported the Chancellor, even during his illness and in spite of the Empress Victoria. He would like me to tell the Emperor that he only wanted “to be let alone” and to die in peace. His work was done, and there was no more future and no more hope for him.

We drove for two hours without a covering in spite of occasional showers; the Prince smoked his pipe. He

talked about his earlier passion for hunting; how he could once go a hundred miles to shoot a stag, and how, now that he was a broken man, he still liked to see the game although he could no longer bring himself to put a hole into the glossy coat of the beautiful animal. He talked about his dead wife, who had been his support in life; tears came into his eyes; the way in which he described his condition was very moving. He also talked of his English relationships, and how he had generally liked the sailors, but not the admirals. . . .

I took care to show him the honours due to royalty; one felt that one could not do otherwise. When I got out I stood at the salute; a small crowd had collected in front of the house and cheered. We went in to supper and again I sat next to Bismarck. Here I must relate an incident which showed his tact. I should have liked to ask him for a photograph with his signature, but I knew how unpleasant it was to be pressed for such a thing, and when I accompanied Prince Henry in Italy I had been disgusted at the struggles which had taken place to secure decorations and photographs. On the other hand I was sorry that I had not ventured to ask old Moltke for a souvenir when I was showing him over the torpedo section in Kiel, in Stosch's time, and had had occasion to appreciate the fine temper of this great single-minded man. Bismarck now spared me the necessity of making the request by professing to remember my old father when in the top form of the Grey Friars School, and handed me his own portrait for my old father, who was then still living.

### III

I visited the old gentleman twice after this; the last time when in the suite of the Emperor, who announced himself with the whole company rather suddenly in Friedrichsruh,

after the ceremonial departure of Prince Henry for Tsingtao. Bismarck received the Emperor in his wheeled-chair at the modest entrance to his country house. We went straight to table. Bismarck had to be assisted to sit down, but after he was seated he was quite fresh again. My place was diagonally opposite the Prince, who was sitting next to the Emperor, and I had at my side von Moltke, the future general. The Prince tried to begin a political conversation on our relations with France, etc. To my great regret the Emperor did not follow up these openings, but carried on the anecdotal conversation which was usual at the Imperial table. Whenever Bismarck broached politics the Emperor ignored him. Moltke whispered to me, "It is terrible"; we felt the lack of reverence for such a man. Then in some connection or other Bismarck said a few words, the prophetic weight of which impressed them deeply upon us: "Your Majesty, so long as you have this officers' corps, you can do everything you want; if this should no longer be the case, things would be quite different." The apparent nonchalance with which this came out, as if there were nothing in it at all, showed an extraordinary presence of mind; it revealed the master.

When we broke up, the Prince in his wheeled-chair accompanied the Emperor as far as the door, and then we each in turn took our leave. Bismarck parted in a friendly way from Bülow, Miquel, and others. Immediately before me came the Chief of the Cabinet, von Lucanus, who had had a share in Bismarck's dismissal in 1890. He offered his hand to the Prince and was on the point of bowing. Then a remarkable scene took place which produced a powerful effect. The Prince sat there like a statue, without moving a muscle; he gazed into space, with Lucanus fidgeting in front of him. The Prince's features were expressionless; there was no dislike there; his face was an immovable mask, until Lucanus understood and withdrew. Then it was my turn, and after me my faithful Captain von Heeringen's.



He was so carried away (he was a man of temperament) that he bent and kissed Bismarck's hand. I was glad of it: I had also tried to make the Prince feel as much as I could, but the action of Herr von Heeringen was more effective. The Prince took Heeringen's head between his hands, and kissed him on the forehead.

This is my last memory of Bismarck.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE NAVY BILLS

1. Education of the people in naval affairs.—2. The first Navy Bill before the Reichstag.—3. The necessity for a second Navy Bill.—4. Unintentionally speedy progress. The fundamental ideas of naval construction.—5. The second Navy Bill before the Reichstag.

### I

FROM now on the Bismarck press supported me. Further, I had personally asked all Princes of the Empire, including the Grand Dukes, for their support, and by lecturing to them had sought to make them feel that they had a share in the decision. This succeeded particularly in the case of a prince like King Albert of Saxony, who was a man of considerable business knowledge and who gave his serious attention to the matter; or like the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, whose own achievements had been of such great service to our naval interests; or like the Grand Duke Frederick of Baden, a man provided with all the qualities of an old-time ruler, whose personality was far above the average, which in my opinion has fallen throughout the whole of Germany during the last generation, both in the royal houses and among the leaders of the various professions. Of course I also visited the Hanseatic towns; and further, the Ministers of the Federal States, my getting to know whom proved in itself a good means of propaganda, particularly as this practice of touring the country was not yet usual at that time.

Then I considered it my privilege and my duty to bring home to the broader masses of the people the interests that were here at stake. It was a question of widening the limited

horizon of the people, of awakening a sense of the civilising influences bound up with the sea, that had suffered or had been pushed on one side by our historical development; of deepening the conviction that this was the way imperatively assigned to us if, instead of resorting to emigration on a large scale, we wanted to maintain at home the crowded masses of Germans in that state of prosperity which they had enjoyed since Bismarck's tariff legislation. Heeringen organised the information department of the Admiralty. He went the round of the universities, where almost all the political economists, including Brentano, were ready to give splendid support. Schmoller, Wagner, Sering, Schumacher, and many others showed that the expenditure on the fleet would be a productive outlay, and illustrated Germany's position, the insecure politico-economic foundation of our whole civilisation and power, and the danger that our superfluous population might become an intolerable burden instead of a source of wealth. They showed how our position in the world was built upon sand, and how Chamberlain's tariff reform schemes would condemn us to vegetate as a small nation, unless we had the power to throw a word in our own favour into the scales against the Powers overseas. Thus the discussion of national political questions received an impetus which formed a healthy counterpoise to socialistic Utopias.

After the death of Treitschke, that splendid man, whose lectures I had attended at the University after 1876, and who had also given me private advice as I sat at his side in Josty's, scribbling my questions on a slip of paper, there were none left of the great historians, who had guided public opinion in an earlier generation. I cannot understand why the spirit of Treitschke has disappeared from the teaching of German history. Without sea-power to protect our industry, we should cease to be a Great European Power, and the argument that we were satisfied, which seemed to be indicated by the aloof attitude of many savants, could only hold good in the question of German unity. After this

question had been solved, however, the other, as to whether we were to mean anything at all to the human race, came forcibly to the front. Perhaps it was the novelty and the speedy development of this political problem that prevented the majority of historians from realising it as clearly as the political economists.<sup>1</sup>

Even the army, with its continental traditions, did not readily keep up with the changes in the international situation. I soon had an illustration of this in the bungling preparations for the miserable China Expedition, in the execution of which the deficient *matériel* and defective mental qualifications of the army administration for tasks which were not connected with the "two-front" war, were only prevented from obtruding themselves upon public notice by the *savoir-faire* of Count Waldersee. But I met with sympathy among prominent soldiers, such as Field-Marshal von der Goltz, with whom I used to speak just as I did with the savants, although laying much more stress on the politico-military point of view. We organised meetings and lectures, and made special efforts to get into touch with the press on a large scale. We received every newspaper impartially, and gave them all positive information without indulging in polemics. They could do with it just what they liked; a

<sup>1</sup> Among the historians I received particular support from Dietrich Schaeffer. Mommsen was still alive and he was quite ready to give me ships, but not a Bill. In conversation with him I told him that his account of the second Punic War seemed to me to fail to realise that Hannibal was conquered by the Roman mastery of the sea. In the same way, the Seven Years War and the Napoleonic Era are generally interpreted in a far too one-sided fashion in Germany. If the traditional teaching of history in Germany had only accustomed us to think more in terms of continents, our head-boy, Bethmann-Hollweg, might have better understood the point on which the whole of the world-war turned. One very melancholy sign of the narrowness of our historical horizon to my mind was the slight regard that was paid to the books of A. v. Peez. I had them distributed in hundreds and also caused Admiral Mahan's work to be translated, in the well-founded hope that the education of the rising generation of our naval officers would contribute to the necessary widening historical and political horizon.

certain gratitude for the material we had given them was always evident, and thus we progressed.

The traditional hospitality of the navy indicated the way in which the public was to be handled. We did not want to put railings round ourselves, but wanted to have the fleet recognised as belonging to the German people. We instituted tours to the water-side and exhibited the ships and the wharves; we turned our attention to the schools, and we called upon authors to write for us: stacks of novels and pamphlets were the result. Prizes were to be given by the Ministry of Education to the schools. The Government, without whose consent a subordinate department like the Admiralty could not undertake anything at all, supported us under Bülow. But the propaganda would have been still more effective if the Ministry had taken it over. We were still rank outsiders. In Prussia, for example, we had no right to use the machinery of state; moreover, no budget grant could be reckoned on for the purpose of such propaganda. I was able, however, to carry out the whole of the campaign, without cost to the State, by means of voluntary contributions. This also was a new procedure in Germany: the decisive thing was that the idea caught on; then the spark spread of its own accord.

There revealed itself a certain need on the part of the nation for a goal, for a patriotic "rally" which would bring them all together. The nation was not yet satisfied. When a nation is satisfied it goes under. Inaction and decline are very much akin. This was not the case with us, and in a short time the fleet was recognised to be a vital question, a self-evident possession of the nation. To be sure, the politically naive German suddenly thought in many cases that he was already *in possession* of a mighty fleet, while we had not got beyond the question of building one. Exaggerations and irrelevant comparisons with England, provocative statements and tactlessness in the press, parliament, and the public generally, were not wholly to be suppressed in spite of the warnings I issued.

The fact that the people were beginning to have an affection for the sea was a distinct advance. The German only sins in exuberance of national feeling, because, an incorrigible political illusionist, he wavers between the two extremes, the fear of power and the intoxication of power.<sup>1</sup>

## II

On September 15th, 1897, I explained the Navy Bill at length to the Imperial Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, for the first time. I made it especially clear that a postponement was not advisable; there would be Reichstag elections next year; so that if the Bill was rejected, a dissolution could be avoided, and the navy question would not make at all an unfavourable election issue. With its party funds exhausted by the elections the next Reichstag would be unwilling to face dissolution. The Ministry gave its consent on October 6th. The publication of the Bill took place early one Sunday morning, so that it had thirty-six hours in which to make an impression before Eugen Richter, who had been very unfriendly towards it, could write against it in the Monday evening paper.

The opponents of a big navy in the Reichstag, and others besides, were offering resistance to the gagging of the Reichstag's right of sanction by this permanent grant. As a precedent, Eugen Richter pointed to the fate of the naval programme in 1865, which was rejected in spite of the warm feeling in the navy's favour because of its important and

<sup>1</sup> The Admiralty did its best to give the public a sober estimate of its work. We also included information about foreign navies in the monthly periodical *Marinerundschau*, and in *Nauticus*, which we published annually as a kind of private handbook, as a means of expressing our opinion on naval matters and the practical issues more freely and without official weight. The sale of *Nauticus* rose from year to year. From the very outset it was of great assistance to us against the anti-navy pamphlets of Eugen Richter and others; and when we were celebrating the acceptance of the first Navy Bill with various Reichstag deputies at my house we laughingly toasted the great anonymous journalist, "Herr Nauticus."



intimate connection with the Constitution question. But more dangerous than the implacability of Richter was the fact that even those circles which acknowledged in substance the essential and well-founded nature of our demands, considered a formal sanction by act of parliament as out of the question, try as I might to obtain it. In this matter my arguments were received with a doubtful shrug of the shoulders even by my best friends. Now, I was concerned above all with the principle of the Bill, as I have indicated above. I pointed out that the fourteen armoured ships which had been acknowledged to be necessary in 1873 were not all sanctioned and built until twenty-one years afterwards; only a formal Act could guarantee the ships being built within a specified time, and it alone could pull the navy out of the confusion, weakness, and critical condition generally into which it had been thrown by its indifferent treatment by the Reichstag.

In order to establish this principle, *i.e.* that of a formal Act, I confined myself in *matériel* to the absolutely essential. We asked for no new taxes or subsidies, we voluntarily restricted our financial requirements to the minimum, binding ourselves to a period of seven (six if need be) years. For the present we only asked for a small "raiding fleet"—anything more than which was out of the question at that time as the technical preparations for building ships on a large scale had yet to be made. We therefore made it appear that by this first step we were not effecting anything more than Stosch's scheme for the foundation of a fleet. The whole procedure was not to appear as a break with the past. The coast-defence idea was mentioned, partly for the sake of its historical connection and partly to prevent ourselves being charged with offensive intentions. There was also the armoured coastal squadron, which was simply included in the Bill. As provision was made at the same time for replacing these coast-defence vessels at a later date, but as nothing definite was said as to the class of substitute, this inclusion of the old types

did not stand in the way of any desirable later development.<sup>1</sup>

It was hoped to get the Bill through the Reichstag in consideration of its being firmly founded on long years of work, so that the scheme presented itself as a reasoned demand, which had not been born in a moment, but had inevitably evolved from experience.

On Capelle's advice, I included a financial limit in the first Navy Bill. As the raising of money offered no difficulties—for, as I have already said, the necessary means were at hand without taxation, this financial limit made the Bill more palatable to the Reichstag; but it created difficulties for us afterwards in the administration of the Bill, because the value of money depreciated steadily.

In order to get into touch with influential Reichstag deputies, I arranged for interviews with my collaborators, and I myself joined in these discussions when I had myself sensed the general trend of feeling. It was impossible to approach Eugen Richter. But a section of the Progressives ranged themselves on our side. The National Liberals were our best friends. I did not need to trouble myself about the Conservatives, who were only lukewarm at first, as with the exception of free-lances they always voted on principle for military Bills, ever mindful as they were of the thorny past and threatened present of Prussian Germany. The balance in the scale was the Centrum.

Like the majority of politicians, Freiherr v. Hertling, who was a friend of our cause, doubted the possibility of our obtaining parliamentary sanction. He said that the previous lack of uniformity in the treatment of all naval questions

<sup>1</sup> In the second Navy Bill we renamed the armoured coast-defence vessels which we possessed "ships of the line," which cost nothing at all, but which definitely established the fact that the ships destined by the Act to replace this class were to be included in the High Sea fleet. The service afloat did not understand the real reason for the inclusion of these old vessels in the fleet as constituted by the Act, and thus this obsolescent class of vessel was given the name of "floating coffins."

had made it too easy for our opponents to arouse feeling against naval schemes; in addition, there were rumours of a *coup d'état*.

Our conversations with Dr. Lieber, the leader of the Centrum, who in spite of his personal sensitiveness proved in practice to be very amenable, finally secured the success of the Bill. The alteration of the time limit from seven years to six was made at the suggestion of Lieber himself.

Thus the leap was made which was first necessary to establish our sea-power in legislation. The Reichstag renounced a portion of its right to interpose every year in the development of the navy. The national view-point superseded that of parliamentary routine. We were ultimately able to convince the Reichstag, because we were ourselves convinced.

### III

In the winter of 1898-9 I was still firmly resolved to keep to the six years' limit. It was, however, always quite clear to me, and I also expressed myself to this effect in the Reichstag, that the first Navy Bill would not create the fleet in its final form. It was frankly stated that we should have to bring forward supplementary demands after the conclusion of the six years' limit.

After the nation had confirmed *on principle* in 1897 the right of existence of a strong fleet, but had imposed strict limitations upon its *matériel*, the time approached when we had to decide whether the political step towards real sea-power was to be ventured upon or whether the whole enterprise was to remain a demonstration of principles. Personally I was determined to proceed from the first step to the second, paying attention meanwhile to the political situation at home and abroad. I had in mind the idea of proceeding "in spurts," nursing the Reichstag as much as possible meanwhile. This nursing, however, proved to be very difficult;

for after we had begun to build seriously, people's expectations exceeded the limits of possibility. Thus, I found myself relieved of the necessity of raising the financial limit much sooner than I had ever surmised, only to begin the preparation of a second Navy Bill.

Since the autumm of 1898 I had already resolved to adopt the principle of arranging all the details of organisation so that they would be adaptable to the future increase of the fleet. Since our measures were directed towards a distant goal, they were often misunderstood within the navy, and led to internal friction, which had to be patiently endured so as not to endanger the general scheme.

In the course of the summer of 1899, we realised that the supplementary estimates could not wait until the conclusion of the six years' limit (1904), and we decided to bring them in at the latest in 1901 or 1902, but to arrange the annual estimates for 1900 in such a manner as to open the way for the supplementary Bill and to announce at the same time that we intended to anticipate the latter by some years. The actual decision as to the contents and date of the supplementary Bill would not then be made until the spring of 1900, after all the details of the draft had been thoroughly elaborated, and the prevailing political conditions had been taken into consideration. I requested and received on September 28th, 1899, the Imperial consent to such a procedure. The Chief of the Naval Cabinet, who was present during the reading of my report to the Emperor, regarded as doubtful the prospects of the Bill in the Reichstag, whereupon the Emperor opined that the iron pitcher (the desire for a navy) would break the earthen one (the Opposition).

I was prompted to this decision by three reasons. The first was of a parliamentary nature. We could not manage with the financial limit fixed in 1898, for we had underestimated the increase in the price of ships. If the building of the new ships which were to be ordered was not to suffer from shortage of money, we should have to approach the

Reichstag in 1900 or 1901 at the latest, but better still at once, with the request that we should be released from the money limit.

If we did this, however, it would be impossible to avoid further inquiries in the Reichstag as to our ship-building plans after the conclusion of the six years' limit. If we had then announced the supplementary Bill for 1904, we should have had a general debate in 1899 to no practical advantage. Thus, it was better to establish from the outset a positive object for this unavoidable parliamentary discussion, and to give the debate the character of a first reading.

The second, and still more important, reason in favour of the speeding-up of the supplementary Bill was of a technical and administrative nature. We had to try to build *as nearly as possible an equal number of ships* each year; our military object and the means at our disposal suggested three big ships a year as our rate of construction. The best thing would have been a straightforward Bill providing for the annual construction of three ships, but the Reichstag would never have agreed to such an abandonment of its right of sanction. It only agreed to bind itself by the first Navy Bill in so far as the latter was based upon the necessities of *organisation*—that is to say, by that organic navy scheme which contained, not single ships, but the *squadron formation*, which had been tested by us as a tactical unit and imitated by the whole world. If we made our demands in terms of squadrons, the Reichstag could cancel squadrons but not ships, because in the latter case it would have exceeded its authority and have interfered in matters of military organisation. This sanctioning of squadron formation which was recognised by the Reichstag, together with the average life of a ship, resulted in a rate of construction which changed from year to year. According to the first Navy Bill the rate of construction of three ships per year would continue until 1901; then we should have reduced it to one ship, and have risen again later to the three-ship rate—even exceeding it from time to time.



The Reichstag would scarcely have taken amiss the reduction to one ship, but it certainly would not have liked the spasmodic increases in the estimates when the rate rose again. Considerable creaking in the parliamentary machine was to be feared, like the complaints that I had in 1912. We should avoid this fluctuation in the rate of construction, however, if we presented a new Navy Bill so opportunely that the maintenance of the three-ship rate followed of its own accord.

The third, and most important, reason why the Foreign Office of those days under Bülow, and I personally, did not want to delay the new Navy Bill for some years was the altered international situation. Violence had been done to a few of our ships in Samoa by English and Americans. This humiliation, combined with the unfortunate Manila affair, had strengthened the feeling in favour of a more effective sea-power among the German public. Other signs of the times were the subjection of the French at Fashoda to the will of the mistress of the seas, England, and the war of the Spaniards against America, which was lost at sea and deprived Spain of her colonies. Finally, the Boer War was casting its shadow before. Enormously increased naval shipbuilding programmes on the part of nearly all the naval Powers pointed to a speeding-up in the world's development, which we had not been in a position to anticipate in 1897. Even in home politics things were developing. The dispute over the Central Canal seemed to be a prelude to the collision between the economic groups, which threatened in 1902 on the occasion of the revision of the commercial treaties, and if the navy question had become mixed up with this it would have run the risk of not being treated on its merits.

At the end of September 1899, therefore, I was prepared, with the Emperor's consent, to include as many troublesome demands as possible in the estimates of 1900, to get in touch with the Reichstag deputies during the winter months of 1899-1900, and to draw up at the Admiralty the form and contents of a new supplementary Bill, the introduction of



which was to be decided in the spring of 1900 according to the international situation and popular feeling.

## IV

As I knew how difficult it was for a man of the Emperor's temperament to allow this matter to mature and to refrain from making it public, I sent a request to the Foreign Secretary on October 11th, asking him to bring his influence to bear on the Emperor to prevent the latter from touching prematurely on the navy question on the occasion of the forthcoming launch of H.M.S. *Karl der Grosse* in Hamburg. Count Bülow readily agreed to this and showed some concern on his own account at the possibility of any political utterances on this occasion.

The launch took place in Hamburg on October 18th, and produced a sensational speech from the Emperor, who, without consulting the Imperial Chancellor or the Foreign Secretary, made a public statement, couched in his own phraseology, on our plans, which were still in the elementary stage. With his phrase, "We have bitter need of a strong German fleet," the Emperor took upon himself the initiative in the eyes of the people. Afterwards, the naval administration had to fight more than ever against the suspicion that their actions proceeded from "absolutist influences against which the Empire's constitution had to be protected."

Meanwhile, it was immediately clear to me, after the Emperor's speech, that I could not remain silent, but must either apply the brake or put on pressure. In the first case, all our prospects would be sacrificed. In the second, work must be hurried on at all speed, and now the order of march was changed. Yet there was no choice. But I wanted to wait at least until the Reichstag should assemble in order to talk things over with the deputies.

The Emperor, on the other hand, demanded the immediate introduction of the supplementary Bill. The Civil Cabinet

urged the same: "Bismarck had made the whole Imperial constitution in twenty-four hours; why did I hesitate like this?" They wanted to distract public attention from the Prisons Bill, and the navy therefore was to be made the subject of debate.

Thus, while we followed up the Emperor's speech, the Admiralty was still in the first stages of its work. The seizure of German Imperial packet steamers by the English about the end of the year then introduced an element of national feeling into the pro-Boer enthusiasm of the German public, already regrettably high; this facilitated, however, at the beginning of 1900, the introduction of the supplementary Bill to which the Emperor was persistently and impetuously urging me. Moreover, thanks to the co-operation of the political economists, public opinion was much stronger in our favour than even we had hoped.

The supplementary Bill was welcomed by Russia, and Prince Hohenlohe reckoned also on France's silent approval. From England the opposite was to be expected, although the Emperor believed on his return from England at the end of November 1899 that he brought with him the congratulations of the British Court and the English Ministers and Naval officials.

When working out the second Navy Bill, we hesitated for a long time whether or not to bring the idea of the English menace into the preamble. I should have preferred to have left England out of it altogether. But such an unusual demand as was presented here, namely, the doubling of our small naval force, made it scarcely possible to avoid hinting at least at the real reason for it. Our public could not be taught to observe silence with regard to England, for, conscious of its own peaceful harmlessness, it believed that it had a right to pour out its moral indignation over the antagonists of the Boers. As all our efforts to damp down the bluster against England were in vain, it was desirable to strike a more sober note in our own declarations on the occasion of

the Navy debate. I decided, therefore, in the preamble to the Navy Bill, to give clear expression to the war aim of the fleet, *i.e.* that of an honest political defensive, and I pointed out in the Reichstag, in December 1899, that the most difficult war situation possible must be taken as the basis for the size and composition of the German navy. This would occur if we were opposed to the greatest of our possible opponents at sea. To this end the fleet must be so constituted that its highest achievement, in a war of defence, would lie in a naval battle in the North Sea.

The lay mind must distinguish here between tactical and political offensives. Every warship, and therefore every battle fleet too, is technically and tactically always an instrument of offence; even the spirit of its leadership, as Stosch said in his correspondence with me, must be "galvanised for the offensive." Politically speaking, however, the proposed German fleet offered the English every guarantee of peace, because the latter were two or three times stronger, and it would have been madness to have let loose a war with such slight prospects of overcoming the British fleet.

On the other hand, what we aimed at was to be so strong that it would mean a certain risk even for the English fleet, with its enormous superiority, to pick a quarrel with us. Herein lay the *political defensive* as well as the *tactical will to fight* in a war of defence.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, this idea of a *risk* which we hinted at was made more popular in the shape of the formula that our navy was not to be maintained on a bigger, nor on a smaller, scale than would be necessary to make an attack upon us seem

<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt said of the American fleet in July 1908: "A first-class battle fleet is the best pledge of peace; a purely defensive fleet is worthless. To support a defensive fleet is practically the same as the founding of a prize for fighting in which only parrying is allowed. A fleet must be able to hammer at its opponents until they throw up the sponge." In the remainder of his speech the President proceeded to talk about the political offensive in a way which, to be sure, was very remote from our conception of the political risk involved by a large fleet.

a hazardous undertaking even to the greatest sea-power. The logical sequence of this idea would have been that a respectable fleet would also increase our qualifications as an ally. All that we said and thought quite unambiguously about this risk applied only to its defensive aspect, but it was systematically distorted by the English press.

In the year 1900 it was universally felt that Germany was about to take the unavoidable step towards a world-policy and to let her flag follow her trade at any rate more literally than before. The fewer big words that were used at such a moment, the fewer perspectives that were opened up (according to the advice given to me by Bismarck at Friedrichsruh), the better. Whilst I regretted that this will to world-power, which was based upon unintentional economic developments and the natural shifting of forces, had created by the various prearranged statements the false impression of being the outcome of a conscious decision and action, I expressed my own conviction to the Emperor at Rominten under the following heads<sup>1</sup>:

“When our object is attained, your Majesty will have an effective force of thirty-eight ships of the line with their auxiliaries. This force will be only surpassed by England. But our geographical position, military system, mobilisation, torpedo boats, tactical training, the systematic construction of our organisation and our unity of command offer us undoubtedly good prospects even against England.

“Apart from fighting conditions, which are by no means hopeless for us, general political motives from the sober standpoint of the business man should destroy any inclination on the part of England to attack us, and lead her to concede to us such a measure of sea-power as would not threaten our justifiable interests overseas. Of the four world-powers, Russia, England, America, and Germany, two are only accessible by sea; it is on this account that political power at sea is coming more and more into the foreground.

“Salisbury’s saying that the big States were getting bigger

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chap. XV.

and stronger and the small ones smaller and weaker, represents the modern development towards a concentration of strength—towards the Trust system. As Germany is particularly behind-hand in regard to sea-power, it is vital for us to make up for lost time. In Germany's development into a world-power in trade and industry obviously lies the best means of keeping her superfluous population German. This development is as irresistible as a natural law. If one tried to dam it up, it would break down the dams. The points of contact and of conflict with other nations naturally increase during such a process of commercial and industrial development, and sea-power is therefore indispensable if Germany is not speedily to decline. This raises political considerations, affecting alliances, which are outside my authority."

In January 1900 I pointed out to the Emperor that our navy programme would never be sufficient to threaten England with attack. The battle fleet, I said, was never intended for war overseas, but solely for the defence of home waters, and it would be a mistaken procedure to go ahead with the second section of the navy awaiting development, the foreign-service fleet, before the battle fleet had materialised.<sup>1</sup>

The foreign-service cruisers for which we had asked had actually been refused by the Reichstag, which had of course to make some reduction.<sup>2</sup> The military issue of the second Navy Bill was the doubling of the battle fleet. Further, the disappearance of a financial limit was of importance.

<sup>1</sup> I made use of the occasion once again to urge upon the Emperor more reticence in his public statements.

<sup>2</sup> As we could not put down more than three big ships in the year, owing to the limitations of our technical arrangements as well as the difficulties of increasing the *personnel*, the six cruisers which were cancelled were not to be commissioned until 1906. Thus the cancelling of them did not really amount to anything. On the occasion of their rejection, however, in 1900, I remarked that we should introduce a supplementary demand for them within the specified period. Hence the demand for these cruisers in 1906. I preferred the *whole* of the foreign-service fleet to be cancelled in 1900; this left a sufficiently big item for the supplementary demand, and in addition one which to a certain extent enjoyed greater popularity than the building of a battle fleet.



## V

In the preliminary negotiations regarding the second Navy Bill, a prominent part was played by the Centrum deputy, Müller-Fulda, a somewhat "erratic" character, who afterwards was not so much to the fore, and who indeed generally worked behind the scenes. To our joy, he moved the abandonment of the financial limit, which he declared to be an undesirable restriction of the Budget. Thus, as we did without a financial limit this time, all our financial difficulties disappeared. The Reichstag's right of annual sanction was left untouched so far as money matters were concerned. The Reichstag showed its appreciation of the fact that it was much more firmly bound from a moral than from a financial point of view; for it had bound itself to a definite ship-building programme by the Bill. If ships became bigger and dearer, the Reichstag, which was now bound to sanction the ships as such by the provisions of the Bill, could not possibly limit their technical construction for financial reasons; it could never assume the responsibility for allowing the ships authorised by the Bill to be turned out either too small or defective in construction, owing to insufficient money grants. By this *lex imperfecta* as represented by the second Navy Bill, which was binding as regards *matériel*, but allowed a free hand as regards finance, the Reichstag surrendered the possibility of refusing money for the new types of vessels, which were increasing in size and cost, unless it was prepared to bring upon itself the reproach of building inferior ships. Thus, in 1900 the Reichstag decided by legal enactment to carry out the naval scheme which had been drawn up, and bound itself morally to create no more financial difficulties for us, as had so soon been the case with the first Navy Bill.

The co-responsibility assumed by the Reichstag by the form of the second Bill justified itself. When we were later compelled by the English to take the giant's leap to the



Dreadnought class, the Reichstag itself proposed the increase to me, although this meant doubling the fighting force of the navy again and the cost as well, but without going beyond the scope of the Bill of 1900.

In order to lessen the opposition of the Centrum, I had recommended the abandonment of paragraph 2 of the "Jesuit Law," but on the advice of Lucanus, supported by Bülow, the Emperor refused to do this. Matters went off well even without that. Our majority was bigger than it had been in the case of the last Army Bills. I have never met with unsurmountable obstacles in the Reichstag, but rather with sympathy on the whole, even from the bourgeois Left. Eugen Richter, it is true, accused me of breaking my word, because, in accordance with the general situation at the time, I had replied in the negative to a question in January 1899, as to whether we intended to bring in any supplementary demands before the conclusion of the six years' limit. I may say that at all times the information that we have given the Reichstag has always been in strict accordance with the truth.

Thus, the second Navy Bill was brought into being, and I was quite aware that it was bound to have quite a different political significance from the first, particularly from the point of view of alliances, because it gave the other navies of the world a chance of establishing a certain balance of power at sea by means of coalition with us.

## CHAPTER XII

### BUILDING THE FLEET

1. Technical difficulties. The nature of our shipbuilding. Safeguards against sinking. The superiority of our shipbuilding over foreign navies.—2. Economy and money shortage. My deficient programme. Submarines and airships.—3. Friction with the other naval authorities.—4. Attitude to Parliament. About *personnel*—Are we on the right lines?—5. My last plans.

#### I

A MAN who has a great object in view is not always in a position to reveal his inmost thoughts. Political work too is based on the divination of uncertain factors; just as the sailor has to steer by dead reckoning, *i.e.* by calculation, when the sky is clouded over, or just as the place for which one is making will not betray its local colour from afar off. During the voyage the prospect often changes, and it is easy for those who are not taking part to find contradictions or dispute the existence of difficulties. They say: if you only talk properly to the Reichstag, the thing will do itself. Those who are working on some special detail readily cling to it; it is only the responsible leader who feels the welter of the conditions around him.

The Secretary of State was to carry out the great programme for the fulfilment of which he had pledged himself to the nation by means of an authority centralised in himself, which was taken for granted by everybody, but which no one really conceded to him. It was a question of justifying the confidence of the community by throwing all one's energy

into the work and overcoming obstacles, the size and number of which exceeded all expectations.

We were immediately faced with a labyrinth of technical and organising problems and differences of opinion. I found that our shipbuilding accommodation was particularly inadequate. Years passed, however, before I could remedy this evil by setting up establishments in which the best lines for purposes of speed could be ascertained by the towing of models; hitherto our technical experts had not given sufficient importance to this. We were restricted in the length and tonnage of our ships by the dock-gates at Wilhelmshaven. These two circumstances are largely responsible for the fact that particularly those ships built during the first period of the Navy Bill could not attain the speed of which their engine-power would have been capable. This was a chronic source of embarrassment until the third Wilhelmshaven entrance was built in 1910. Moreover, we were put at a great disadvantage in contrast to all other shipbuilding nations by the sand-bars in our North Sea estuaries, which prevented us giving our vessels the draught they needed. In a certain sense we were hampered by the restriction for which the Dutch had to pay dearly in the seventeenth century in their fight against the British. In all essentials, a naval battle is a fight of one ship against another; the decisive technical factor is rather the concentration of force in the individual ship than the actual number of ships. As the Dutch could not build their vessels very big owing to the courses of their rivers, as the English were able to do, the latter obtained this superiority. We had therefore to overcome these and many other obstacles within a few years in such a way that in spite of everything our ships surpassed the English in fighting value.

Generally speaking, the building of the fleet was rendered more difficult by the low standard of our technical construction at that time. The administrative officials at the Admiralty had been given too much power over the technical side of

the navy ; the profession of a naval architect was far from brilliant, both as regards pay and social position. The silent struggle between lawyers and engineers was one of the reasons why we had to begin the construction of the fleet with a *personnel* which was insufficient in numbers and lacking in experience. The technical adviser-in-chief to the Admiralty had fortified his position ; he locked up the things worth knowing in his notebook and would not suffer the existence of a rival. This state of affairs might have brought us to ruin. Meanwhile, technical achievement could not develop slowly, as the organisation could, but it had to set to work fully equipped from the outset on the construction of the fleet and accomplish at once almost as much in speed and output as it would be doing ten years later. I began therefore from the very first to try to improve the status of the technical branch, and to create a "nursery" for it ; I tried to get to know the individual members, and picked out those who might develop into future shipbuilders, which comparatively few of them do. The English appoint a chief constructor with almost sovereign powers and give him a salary of £5,000. I should like to have seen such "extravagance," which well becomes the magnificence of an old aristocracy, proposed to the Treasury and the grudging democrats of our Parliament ! I formed a special fund for research in construction, and awarded those men who distinguished themselves bonuses up to the value of £200. But although I sent them the money with a letter asking them to say nothing about it, the punctilious honesty of the German was too strong ; the recipients themselves asked for an equal distribution of the fund *propter invidiam* of the others ! Thus it was no wonder that private enterprise enticed many good engineers away from us ; in many cases the men reported sick after a short time and went straight to some big firm. In spite of these and innumerable other difficulties, which cannot be discussed here, we succeeded in course of time in beating the English in the quality of our naval ship-

building, a state of affairs which also became evident in the case of private firms engaged in the construction of big passenger liners.

A year after I had taken office, there occurred a difficult period of transition, in which for lack of other talent an executive officer, Admiral Büchsel, had to fill the breach as architect-in-chief. Among the other shipbuilding officials whom I intended for higher posts, and to whom I gave opportunities of preparing themselves for the great object before them by sending them on cruises and seconding them for special duties, especial merit is due to our later architect-in-chief, Geheimrat Burkner. Personally I considered the way he co-operated with us, the executive officers, in our mutual and indivisible task to be ideal. The other members of the technical staff have also contributed their full share to our constantly improving and finally unrivalled naval construction. The nature of our shipbuilding, and the sum total of the intellectual labour crystallised in it, may be made clear to the lay mind by an example.

In naval warfare the main object is not territorial gain, but the annihilation of the enemy; since the introduction of steam power and modern guns this is no longer effected by boarding the enemy, but only by sinking him. So long as a ship is afloat, she retains a certain fighting value and can afterwards be easily refitted. Thus the deadly injury of that part of a ship below the water line is the ultimate aim of the weapon of attack, and the increasing of buoyancy the main object of protective measures. Until 1906 our ships were but little protected against attack below the water line, whilst the English ships were badly protected even as late as this war. With the *older ships*, a hit by a torpedo generally resulted in the sinking of the ship, as is shown, for example, by the successful fight of the *U9* with three big English cruisers. As soon as the Navy Bill was settled I caused this question of buoyancy to be taken up with great thoroughness. We soon found out that we had to experiment

with actual explosions in order to gain sufficient experience. As we could not sacrifice modern ships, and could not learn enough from the older ones, we built a section of a modern ship by itself and carried out experimental explosions on it, with torpedo heads, carefully studying the result every time. We tested the possibility of weakening the force of the explosion by letting the explosive gases burst in empty compartments without resistance. We ascertained the most suitable kind of steel for the different structural parts, and found further that the effect of the explosion was nullified if we compelled it to pulverise coal in any considerable quantity. This resulted in a special arrangement of a portion of the coal bunkers. We were then able to meet the force of the explosion, which had been modified in this way, by a strong, carefully constructed, steel wall which finally secured the safety of the interior of the ship. This "torpedo bulkhead" was carried without interruption the whole length of the vital parts of the ship. These experiments, which were continued through many years, and on which we did not hesitate to expend millions, yielded moreover information concerning the most suitable use of material and the construction of the adjoining parts of the ship. In addition to this, the whole of the ship below the water line was designed to provide for failure to localise the effects of the explosion or for several hits being made, and so forth; endless labour was expended upon details such as the pumping system or the possibility of speedily counteracting a list by flooding corresponding compartments. Finally, we completely abandoned the practice of connecting the compartments below the water line by watertight doors, which had played such a fateful part in the sinking of the *Titanic* and other ships.

The buoyancy which was attained by our system stood the test. In contrast to the British ships, ours were well-nigh indestructible. The whole English fleet went on hammering the little *Wiesbaden*, and yet the poor ship would not sink.



Although the *Mainz* was shot to pieces and torpedoed, she could not be sunk until an officer and a torpedo artificer, after everybody else had left the ship, opened the torpedo tubes, and went down with the ship. The distinguished commander of the *Emden* put his ship at a coral reef under full steam, and yet the inner structure stood firm. It was astounding what our ships could stand in the way of mines and torpedoes without sinking. During Admiral v. Rebeur's attack upon Imbros, the *Goeben* struck three heavy mines, but she was still able to return to the Bosphorus under her own steam, whilst a modern English ship of the line, the *Audacious*, sank in the Irish Sea after striking one single mine. It was only our older ships, like the *Pommern* and the *Prinz Adalbert*, built at a time when our experiments on buoyancy had not been concluded, that showed less power of resistance.

The supreme quality of a ship is that she should remain afloat, and, by preserving a vertical position, continue to put up a fight; in this respect the English navy was so much behind ours that the difference in this quality alone might decide the issue of a naval engagement. But our shipbuilding also aimed at the highest degree of fighting efficiency in every other direction. Inasmuch as we were aiming principally at qualities which only tell in battle, the excellence of our ships could not even be correctly estimated by all executive officers in times of peace, particularly as we had to abandon a number of well-known qualities and conveniences which are all right in peace-time for the sake of effectiveness in battle. The complete absence of doors, for example, in those parts of the ship under the water line was most inconvenient; such a thing, however, might at the critical moment decide one's fate. In every naval engagement that is fought to a finish, there is the psychological moment when the one side suddenly thinks "Good God, the enemy is sinking and we are not, they are on fire and we are not"; and from that moment this side will have hardly any losses, whilst the enemy loses everything. How our ships compared with the English

vessels of the same years may be shown by a few figures. Quite apart from our better ammunition, etc., a most carefully conducted examination showed that our *Derfflinger* could pierce the heaviest armour of the British *Tiger* at a range of 11,700 metres, whilst the *Tiger* could not pierce that of the *Derfflinger* until it was within 7,800 metres' range. A similar superiority in armament and armour plating, calculated to grip the imagination of any reflecting person, existed in the case of nearly all battle-ships of the same years.

While translating in shipbuilding our conception of warfare into terms of iron and steel, we were giving up other things which would have won immediate recognition and would have spared us the continual critical comparison of our ships with the advertisements of foreign firms. We had heavier displacements, owing to the thick and heavy armour-plating at the water line, to our provisions against sinking and against fire, to the special measures taken to ensure the safety of the parts from which the ship was controlled, and so on.

We had secured the superiority in quality of our fleet over the English for the decisive years in Germany's development and thereby acquired an important counterpoise for our inferiority in numbers. Naturally few people in Germany knew anything definite about this superiority; many, but not all, trusted the creators of the fleet. A ship afloat in time of peace did not exhibit its solid qualities and fighting value; it was a matter of indifference whether its armour plating was thick or thin. On the other hand an opportunity was afforded, and eagerly grasped by fault-finders in Germany, when it was a question if our heavy guns were of a smaller calibre than the English; it was *not* seen that, apart from our more effective projectiles, we obtained in practice the same results in the matter of armour-piercing with our smaller calibre as the English with their greater, and besides, obtained other very important advantages. The conservatism of my working methods often seemed unnatural in many people's opinion, and was hated mortally

by those who liked to draw up lists of what they wanted from the misleading foreign specifications. If our ships, which were handed over to the enemy in such a shameful manner, are scientifically examined, the English will be amazed as they work through the whole, as well as through the hundred-and-one details, to find what rivals they had in the Germans in their own particular province of ship-building. The English have not been nearly so conscientious and intelligent in their work as we have been. As the English are not Germans, however, they will only reluctantly admit that the foreign work is better than their own. I am reluctant to make this statement. But if our nation is to learn anything from its fate, it must realise the suicidal tendency in its nature. For many did not understand the weapon that they possessed in the German fleet until after the Battle of Jutland. There was too much delay in drawing at the right moment the historical consequences from its possession.

When the German armies went to war in 1870 with an inferior rifle, the troops were told: "The chassepot is only superior at long range. So run in under its range, and then you will have the superiority at 500 yards."

The German navy had only to be told the truth, and they would have been able to go into battle in August 1914 with an unconquerable feeling of superiority. Instead of this, it was considered the thing among the senior officers in the navy to criticise all short-comings in detail. This introduced a trait into the officers' corps that was dangerous in time of war; there was more doubt than faith. It goes without saying that we could have improved things here and there. But the final result should be looked at. Our Germany of 1914 was not able to do this. It acted on the lines of the motto inscribed on the shooting range at Meppen:

You can score a hundred hits,  
And people nod and go their way,  
But ne'er a puppy that forgets  
If you score a miss one day.

At bottom the German nation had a great deal of luck with the construction of its belated fleet, for it was built with a clear purpose in view, and so completed at the right moment. But ultimate and decisive good fortune was denied it, partly owing to the tendency in Germany to find fault with things made at home and to admire everything foreign. It was also partly owing to this that the fleet was not thrown into the scale at the right moment, with the consequences that I shall deal with later.

## II

Naval shipbuilding is applied tactics, but it is also at the same time a money question. If Germany was to have a useful fleet, we could not allow ourselves any large unnecessary expenditure at all. The success of the work of the interested naval officers and the extensive staff of loyal officials can only be duly honoured by those who take our financial restrictions into account. No foreign navy has ever produced such a maximum of achievement with such a minimum of means. As we purchased in 1898 the principle of the permanent maintenance of the supply of ships mainly by renouncing any new taxation, and disarmed the Reichstag by pointing to the financial resources already at hand, we were never afterwards able to draw on fresh resources. In naval expenditure we were not only behind England, but far behind America at all times, and now and again even behind Russia and France; by wiser use of our money, however, we succeeded in building the second strongest navy in the world. To be sure, there are patriots to-day who reckon it as one of the sins of the German navy that it accomplished so much with the means voted by the Reichstag.<sup>1</sup>

Economy requires exact work and business-like principles. The Admiralty acquired a certain reputation for beating down prices, for making speculative purchases of land, and

<sup>1</sup> Vide Appendix,

so forth. Never again will Germany acquire so cheaply such an admirable piece of work. This rich nation which did not need to count the milliards in time of war, in the time of its prosperity turned over anxiously in its hand the millions—and even the thousands—which given to its army and navy might have secured the permanence of peace and its own continued welfare.

After the resignation of Prince Bülow, who gave the navy full sympathy, the latter fell a victim to chronic money hunger. I have had to fight for the most necessary grants until I was tired out, less with the Reichstag, which evinced growing insight, than with the Secretary of the Imperial Treasury and with the Imperial Chancellor, who, the one blinded by departmental fanaticism and the other by political dreams, suppressed a great deal that was desirable for Germany's armament during those years, because, as they said, Germany had no money to spare for this purpose. I put through at that time what could not be delayed; hoping, with a heavy heart and the feeling of being hindered in the development of our armed defences, to obtain the means to supplement later. There was less room than ever for subsidiary matters; but in spite of this I applied all my energy to new developments, such as, for example, the construction of submarines, as soon as they had been made serviceable for war, so that even in this arm we were superior to all foreign navies at the outbreak of war.

The efforts of certain political circles to decry the achievements of the navy led during the war to a campaign of lies regarding my former official activities; this brought home to me in lively fashion the tendency of men, and particularly of Germans, to rate criticism higher than creation, to regard what has been done as a matter of course, and what still remains to be done as an omission. Even in the time of my popularity I was always quite clear that the "Hosanna" of the moment is readily followed by the "Crucify" of the morrow. I do not regret on my own account, but for



the nation's sake, that confidence in the navy was artificially shattered, but I do not want to waste the reader's time with these quarrels, which will presumably soon be forgotten. I refer him to the appendix of this book, which has been added in order to prevent the field being left clear by ambiguous silence for those whose pleasure it has been to decry the loyal labours of a generation.

Even in time of peace I was accustomed to being reproached with backwardness, but I did not consider it correct, in view of foreign countries, to enlighten the public. My tried method of waiting to prove the military usefulness of a new invention before adopting it universally was proof against disappointments, and was the chief foundation of our successes, but of course it exposed me to the reproaches of the inventors and of impatient patriots. I will take two examples, the submarine and the airship. I refused to throw away money on submarines so long as they could only cruise in home waters, and therefore be of no use to us; as soon as sea-going boats were built, however, I was the first to encourage them on a large scale, and, in spite of the financial restrictions imposed upon me, I went as far as the limits of our technical production would permit.

The question as to how the submarines were to be used could not be answered practically until the instrument itself was there. The immediate question, therefore, was to construct boats which could operate overseas, and, as soon as this was possible, build as many of them as we could. This was done, and consequently nothing was neglected.

What was to be done with the arm thus constructed could only be shown by the special necessities of war. If the English had not thrown international naval law overboard, wholly in their own interests, the submarine war on merchant shipping could have been regarded from a totally different point of view. As soon as it was possible for submarines to operate overseas, the war on merchant shipping came into question; no special father was needed for this idea. The great



hopes that had been centred in the High Sea fleet, however, made submarines at first the auxiliary organs of the Staff. Then when the transition took place to the campaign against merchant shipping, everything that could have been prepared for this purpose in time of peace was already done. To expect the navy to have foreseen and considered all the developments of the war is the same as to demand that the army should have prepared some defence against tanks in time of peace.<sup>1</sup>

As a naval officer who had got to know the force of the wind and the malice of squalls on sailing ships, I never promised myself much from the airships, and the war has proved me right in this. I set much greater expectations on the development of the aeroplane. During the Zeppelin craze which passed over Germany I kept myself in the background as much as possible, without appearing a wet blanket. As a proof of the urgent temptation to over-hasty adoption all around me in this and many other provinces, I reproduce a letter together with my answer.

“BERLIN,

“August 27th, 1912.

“YOUR EXCELLENCY,

“Forgive my disturbing your holiday; but it is a question of an urgent and important matter—the improvement of our airship construction! The new naval airship will represent an enormous advance. To me the time seems to have come when we should proceed to the systematic building of an aerial fleet; for as things are at present we shall not turn our advantage to any account. The creator of the German fleet should also be the creator of the German aerial fleet. A definite building programme and all that this includes is necessary if we are to retain the lead, and in the circumstances a Bill to this effect. The cost will not be too great, for with 30,000,000 marks we can build in three years eighteen to twenty Zeppelins, together with nine or ten hangars each holding two ships, including, further, the cost of commissioning the ships for from 250 to

<sup>1</sup> Vide Appendix,

300 days. This calculation is based on the following annual expenditure of 10,000,000 marks :

	Marks.
1. Building six ships . . . . .	4.50 millions
2. Building three hangars for above . . . . .	3.00 „
3. Commissioning each ship, 800 marks per day—therefore six ships for 300 days . . . . .	1.44 „
4. Other expenditure . . . . .	1.06 „
	<hr/>
	10.00 „
	<hr/>

“Thus with 30,000,000 marks a very great deal could be done for peace and for our own safety. The money for this purpose exists, in the first place in the surplus of 1911, of which all was not used by the Defence Bill; 1912 is also going well and will certainly yield a surplus. A systematic procedure is to be recommended, otherwise it will be the same as with the navy before 1898. . . . I wish your Excellency a good recovery and with the most respectful greetings,

“I am,

“Your Excellency's devoted servant,

“M. ERZBERGER, M.d.R. (*Member of the Reichstag*).”

“ST. BLASIEN,

“September 6th, 1912.

“DEAR HERR ERZBERGER,

“I send you my best thanks for your letter of August 27th, which interested me greatly. From it I see with great pleasure that you take a warm interest in the utilisation of airships for the defence of the Fatherland, just as you do in the army and navy. I am afraid that the new arm will not be pushed forward so speedily as your letter suggests. After settling the naval and military estimates of the last year, the Reichstag will not unjustly demand that the Zeppelins asked for should be first tested as to their use at sea and on the coast. If that was not necessary, a well-founded complaint could be brought against the Government on the score of its not having put forward in the military estimates of last year a larger allowance for airships such as you outlined in your letter. A thorough-going test combined with the selection and

training of the necessary *personnel* is, I am firmly convinced, also absolutely essential if we are not to suffer severe disappointments. The use of airships on a large scale for military purposes will still give rise to many difficulties, although it will probably come to this, but not in a day as your patriotic heart desires and imagines.

“With kind regards,

“Yours faithfully,

“VON TIRPITZ.”

### III

Busy civilians, and business houses who were not concerned so much with the usefulness of their goods for war purposes as with their wholesale delivery, formed only the one wing of my critics; the other was composed of specialists.

To be just, I must say that the extraordinary leaps forward made in engineering while we were building our fleet had necessarily given rise to lively controversies among the experts, and had occasioned difficult compromises. It proved to be dangerous to make any definite arrangements a long way ahead. Every ship became obsolete by the time it was finished, and the critics did not always remember that, when building was begun, it could not be otherwise. Internal struggles are also to be found in the history of foreign navies as things begin to develop. Yet the partition of the Admiralty on the accession of William II was the cause of inter-departmental friction, which wore me out more in the course of the years than either the Reichstag or the work I had in hand. I stood under fire from all sides.

After the Navy Bill had been passed, the Executive Command was annoyed, because the Bill with its battle fleet did not correspond with the draft of a foreign-service fleet drawn up with the co-operation of the Executive Command.<sup>1</sup> On

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, page 92 *et seq.* For some time the teaching at the Naval Academy had been in favour of the cruiser war, and against the High Sea fleet until I intervened, for it was not fitting for our shipbuilding to be opposed by our highest school of training.

the other hand, I had objections to the political activity of the Executive Command, which had used its influence in the Delagoa and Manila affairs; it was surely enough for two naval authorities, the Admiralty and the Cabinet, to have a hand in politics. The really natural promise which had been given to me when I took up my duties, that I should be consulted in the use of the foreign-service ships, had not been kept. I now demanded that the foreign-service ships should be put under the Admiralty, but I did not succeed in getting the Emperor's consent. In this quarrel the authority of the Supreme War Lord was played off against me, which, it was said, would be narrowed if the Secretary of State, who was responsible to the Reichstag, were to receive too extensive powers. I could hardly say anything in reply to this argument, and I had to make the best of it, in order to make headway. So I accomplished the break-up of the Executive Command in Berlin, in the course of which I had repeatedly to send in my resignation; I succeeded by convincing the Emperor that his own authority could scarcely bear the existence of an Executive Command on the one hand and the Admiralty on the other, in view of the powers which had hitherto been allotted to each. A portion of the powers of the Executive Command were now transferred to the Admiralty, and the rest were given partly to the naval stations in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven and partly to the newly formed "General Naval Staff."<sup>1</sup>

This partition was effected for lack of the better arrangement which was unattainable, the centralisation of the navy in a

<sup>1</sup> The General Naval Staff was formed on an analogous scheme to the General Staff. I do not know whether it was a fortunate thing for the army that the General Staff grew so consistently independent as an after-effect of Moltke's greatness. This perhaps led to the estrangement of the General Staff from technical matters and to the fact that the War Ministry had so little to do with war. In any case such a cleavage on the part of the General Naval Staff would not do for the navy; it was a decadent idea which did not lead to the institution of a really energetic collective authority.

Board of Admiralty, such as always existed in England, and existed with us until 1888.

During Caprivi's latter term of office I dissuaded him from the partition of the Admiralty. Caprivi shared my views. In the following years of my tactical work I had placed too great hopes upon rearrangement of organisation among the newly divided authorities, as I did not realise clearly enough at that time that the fact that the Admiralty was so little occupied with active-service problems was due more to individuals than to organisations. Then when I took charge of the building of the fleet, it was clear to me and to the majority of officers of good judgment that the Admiralty needed other powers whilst the fleet was being constructed than during the period of inactivity. What unlimited powers did not the Americans give Goethals when he was to build the Panama Canal! As we had now to reckon with division of authority in the navy, even this was more bearable than the dualism which existed between an Executive Command in Berlin, with authority over the whole navy, and the Admiralty. With all this fencing going on around me, I could not fail to be charged with tyranny and defection from the views I had held when in the Executive Command. The fact is that I had to protect myself from this confusion of forces with a different defence according to my position and the state of my work at the time, whereby the curse of this divided authority kept cropping up again and again in different places.

In the long run the success of an organisation depends upon the men who work in it. A great creative work can only be accomplished by one who has in his own heart the conviction of the rightness of his own aims, and in the main finds the way himself to his goal, or else identifies himself entirely with his work. Advice and suggestion stream in, and nothing would be a greater mistake than not to give them full consideration. But the decision must rest with those who feel the difficulties and responsibilities of execution.



The navy was an unusually finely adjusted organism. The continual interchange of men, selected for the central authorities, between the General Naval Staff and the service afloat deprived the idea of its justification in fact, that the General Naval Staff could as a naval strategic authority judge questions of development better than the Admiralty.

Between the naval authorities on land there was instituted in course of time a barely sufficient working relationship. We also succeeded in keeping in check the natural demand of the North Sea and Baltic stations for coastal defence and coastal warfare, since this could only have been satisfied at the expense of the fleet, *i.e.* the politico-military importance of the navy. Relationships with the Command of the High Sea fleet were not so clear, for this Command had gained in influence as the construction of the High Sea fleet progressed, and was developing a tendency to unite under itself all *matériel* afloat.

The French and English used to give the Commander-in-Chief of the fleet command of a squadron and thus gave him a "private possession" of his own. We had retained the arrangement from the time of the Executive Command, however, of putting the Commander-in-Chief on a special Fleet-Flagship outside the squadron formations. We hesitated as to whether the foreign method which was supported by naval history, or our own arrangement corresponded better with modern conditions. I wanted to clear up the matter by tactical experiments. But I met with insurmountable resistance in this matter. The question of the flagship became a departmental intrigue. In this connection, I was given great anxiety by the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the fleet, which was becoming more and more a kind of monopoly; and after the retirement of Köster, a strict master after the fashion of Frederick William I, the Cabinet was not always guided by common-sense arguments, and certainly not by a great knowledge of human nature, in its choice of his successor. From my study of the French



navy, which was more accessible than the British, I had seen that a change of Commander-in-Chief practically always led to a change of tactics, and to the loss of a large portion of previously gained experience. I had regarded the chief activity of the officials on shore belonging to the Naval Staff to be the co-ordination and development of these experiences; but the active participation of the latter in the fleet manœuvres was restricted more and more by the power of the Commander-in-Chief. Further, whereas the juxtaposition of the numerous corps leaders led to a useful rivalry in the army, the views of the Commander-in-Chief of the High Sea fleet soon hardened into dogma in view of his incontrovertible position, although there was a great need here also for useful clash of opinion. In order to keep alive constructive criticism, for which our Imperial manœuvres did not suffice, and in order to facilitate the rise of independent characters endowed with the gift of leadership, as well as to revive the search for truth in contrast to the drill and the fine fighting formations, I proposed—though in vain—to leave the various sections of the fleet much more independence and to bring them together only for the purpose of the big manœuvres; moreover, I also suggested that these manœuvres should not be necessarily in the charge of the Commander-in-Chief, but of different leaders from time to time, irrespective of seniority.

When I am reproached with not having concentrated the navy in the hands of one person in time of peace, my power is being over-estimated. In view of the jealousy of different Heads of Departments, and the Emperor's nature, I was only able to smooth over, instead of putting an end to, the harmful friction which arose from the division of the naval organism into so many sections. There was only one way open to me, and that was not to give any predominant influence to those in the Emperor's immediate *entourage*, to leave the Emperor the feeling that his prerogative was not being encroached upon, and to cherish the hope that in the

event of war the monarch would create a Supreme Naval Command which would combine everything in the hands of one man. The nation, which had no idea of the half-measures of the authorities and the compromises which were hampering production, ascribed all the responsibility to the Secretary of State, a fact which I felt very deeply. But owing to the lack of a unified Admiralty I often had to negotiate between the various sections instead of taking action.

The most difficult part of the situation for me was when the Chief of the Naval Cabinet, von Senden, in spite of his chivalrous nature and his warm-hearted interest in the advancement of the navy, began to pursue from time to time a very arbitrary policy in questions affecting my department. To give a picture at random of my feelings amidst the changing factions and *côteries* which hardly gave me any rest at all and the extraordinary activity of the Emperor in naval matters, I may quote from an old letter of mine to Prince Henry :

“ With regard to the question of First Class cruisers, I have not succeeded in convincing His Majesty that any step in the direction desired by him means the collapse of our Navy Bill. . . . Most of the gentlemen who have no responsibility but a big say in this matter do not see the whole situation. . . . It would really be selling a birthright for a mess of pottage if we were to try to modify the fundamental principles of the Navy Bill in the one cruiser which still remains to be finished. A Chief of Cabinet probably could think so, but not a Secretary of State who is watching His Majesty's true interest and feels himself responsible for it. While nothing did us so much harm formerly in our demands on the Reichstag as a certain restlessness and eternal changing of views and plans, we have now actually collected together a certain fund of confidence in this direction, which stands our demands in good stead. If we give the Opposition an opportunity of talking again about the changeable art of war, the zig-zag course, etc., we shall be putting a very sharp weapon into its hands.

“Will your Royal Highness be pleased to take it in good part if I have allowed my pen to run away with me when discussing these worries, but I am very near to despair when I think of the difficult and dangerous position of our State, which is exerting its natural influence upon the Admiralty, on the eve of a supplementary Bill; and when I see on the other hand how irresponsible advisers are aggravating the difficulty only too seriously, and consequently to the ultimate detriment of His Majesty’s interests. . . .”

## IV

The Reichstag did not give me so much trouble. What had to be passed was absolutely indispensable; but the confidence of the Reichstag in the official handling of armament questions was certainly becoming stronger. By means of information from all quarters and personal inspection of ships, dockyards, etc., the Deputies had convinced themselves as to the way the work was being carried out. This led to the disappearance of all conflicts between the Reichstag and the Government. My comparative independence of the Reichstag enabled me on the whole to let all captious criticism exhaust itself. Under a purely parliamentary system of Government on the other hand, progressive officials are almost bound to be stifled by the national vices of pettiness, party jealousy, and unbounded capacity for illusion. Parliamentarism cannot build a fleet, even if it spends a great deal on it as in France. The English succeed because the qualities of the nation and its great historical tradition have constructed a firm foundation. Even in my time parliamentary bodies had to be kept in a good humour; a good deal of work was needed to keep them quiet, and a great deal of fruitless haggling; they needed always, as somebody said, “a ball to play with.” Thus, in order to be able to stand firm on the main issues, I sometimes had to sacrifice unimportant things to the Reichstag. Once this affected the personal affairs of the officers’ corps, to my great

regret, as for example in the reduction of mess allowances; the officers concerned were dissatisfied and mobilised their forces against the Secretary of State, who was dependent upon Parliament. I have, however, always endeavoured to support the *personnel* of all categories.

In the same measure as the squadrons increased and spread the realm of the navy along the coast, and as land was reclaimed from the sea by building dykes, villages expropriated, and whole towns and mighty workshops founded and constructed, the many-membered family of the navy grew far and wide. We were the only Imperial institution which drew hundreds of thousands from a provincial way of looking at things to a common horizon. The navy became the melting-pot of "Germanism." Before the inactivity of the High Sea fleet during the war killed the life which was coursing through it, the growing strength of Germany could be felt in its pulse-beat. No navy in the world had such an excellent *personnel* as we had in our coastal population, in the merchant seamen who, owing to their service in the navy, cast off more and more their former international character, and in the fishermen who, particularly indispensable for the manning of our small ships, returned to their villages, after serving in the navy, with a widened mental horizon and professional ambition. When our Old Prussian people on the shores of the Baltic with their handiness, and our North Sea folk with their heavy strength, were no longer sufficient for the growing needs of our *personnel*, we went inland for recruits; service on modern ships did not make the same demands on seamanship as in the old days of sailing vessels. The South Germans, and among them the Alsatians, distinguished themselves in the navy. Under the leadership of an excellent engineering corps, service in the navy afforded a very good schooling for the technical *personnel*; the industries fought for our stokers.<sup>1</sup> The best of our youth joined

<sup>1</sup> As the modern ships demanded a big increase of the engineering *personnel* which is recruited from the industrial districts, and since they remained

the officers' corps—think of our submarine commanders—and indeed all the more gladly as the magnitude of our task seemed to increase. The outsider can hardly imagine the hard work that was done in the navy. Never has the State been served more joyously and more devotedly. We felt ourselves to be the outposts of a great people which, thanks to its State, was about to acquire freedom and equality among the nations of the world.

Soon therefore the worst was over, and we were able to extend our aims. With a greater separation of the fleet from barracks and home shores the navy would have become more and more a part of the nation, which needed something like this ; for it does not know even to-day what a treasure it possessed in the officers' corps alone.

I should like to see the purely destructive fools who are now exulting over the dissolution of the old Germany as over a great deed create an organism which could equal this one example of our old Imperial institutions in solid strength and devotion to their common ideal. The view-points of world-policy were concentrated most strongly in the navy ; therefore we were bound to become a power in the nation. Since circumstances and persons, which I will discuss later, squandered the peace secured by the fleet, and let slip the victory which the fleet promised, the nation has sunk so low that it is ashamed of its one-time strength and takes pleasure in abusing that which has so long been its pride and joy.

In my proposals to keep the organisation alive, and generally in my desire to follow up the constantly changing conditions of naval efficiency, I often found myself opposed by circumstances and the special departments. Many

practically shut up in the dockyards, this formed a favourable soil for Socialist agitation, the more so since the workmen in the dockyards came most into touch with the engineering *personnel* of the navy. In time of peace no apparent harm had come from this.



admirals stamped me after 1897 as the Director of Administration and the supplier of *matériel* to the navy, although my own line of development and my own inclination was in the direction of naval tactics. As a consequence I had to see a great deal of which I did not approve, without being able to interfere in any way.

The united spirit which had animated the whole navy in the 'eighties and the first half of the 'nineties was to a certain degree lost. The men who were put in command at the beginning of the war would hardly have yielded in such fatal manner to the political leaders' fear of giving battle, if the specialist departmental policy which was the fashion had allowed the capital of our previous tactical work to be drawn upon to the full. When I heard of the operation order of the Naval Staff on July 30th, 1914, I was terrified by the theoretical speculation which in certain quarters had over-ridden the spirit of resolute initiative, owing to the subdivided treatment of the main questions. In spite of this the navy was good; it had worked tremendously hard, even though not always in the most appropriate direction. And so it only needed the right command to bring out all its qualities and to lead the fleet, such as it was, to victory.

It is with a bleeding heart that one thinks of the circumstances which have hurled the German nation back into the darkness when it was so near its highest perfection.

To the astonishment of Europe, the Prussia of the eighteenth century had grown in a few years from an indifferent member of the impotent German people to a great power, thanks to the development and good leadership of her military strength by the Hohenzollern kings. It looked as though the German Empire was going to be able to retrieve its belated development to a world-power just as speedily and successfully by the rapid creation of its sea-power, assisted as it was in this by many favourable circumstances. The apparent unreadiness of the nation as a whole to understand the grave neces-



sity for this undertaking in every detail likewise resembled the position of Prussia in the eighteenth century, which had been still less comprehended by the whole nation. But imagine what would have happened to Prusso-German history, if, instead of a Frederick William I and a Frederick the Great, a much-divided military authority had had to make decisions under a highly commendable War Council! What we lacked most of all was the unification of the Admiralty.

## V

The reproach which is levelled at me from time to time of having pursued a one-sided and obtuse battle-fleet policy, is based upon an error. In comparison with the historical progress of our empire, we were late in going out into the world and upon the sea. In the bustle of the world, however, we had to expect conflicts of interests. It was important that we should avoid such things, and indeed impose restrictions upon our activity so long as the under-structure of our power was not secure. Until this was strengthened by our fleet and by political support, we could not move with any freedom upon the seas of the world and demand equal rights. Our, and particularly my, personal task therefore lay primarily in the creation of this sea-power, and this could only be done by the institution of the battle fleet. Moreover, we were compelled by the threats of the British in the first decade of this century to concentrate our fleet in force in home waters. Under these conditions trans-Atlantic expeditions, such as the China campaign, the action against Venezuela or the Agadir affair seemed to me altogether undesirable, quite apart from their particular disadvantages, for they only gave rise to jealousy of a State which could not yet be regarded as an equal at sea. During the last few years before the war, however, I saw the time approaching when England's inclination to attack us